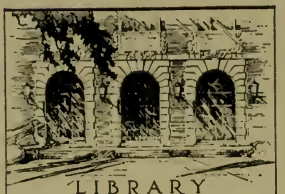

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MERKLAND.

A STORY

OF

SCOTTISH LIFE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF MRS. MARGARET MAITLAND."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MERKLAND.

CHAPTER I.

"A stout heart to a stey brae."

PROVERB.

WITHIN a week after these agitating events, Archibald Sutherland, in company with the anxious and attentive factor, rode into Portoran, to meet the third individual of their council, Mr. Foreman, and engage in a final consultation. During the days which had intervened since Archibald's return, there had already been much discussion and deliberation between the two good men, who took an interest so kindly in his changed fortunes. Mr. Fergusson, who had a distant kinsman, the

most inaccessible and hypochondriacal of nabobs, and under whose ken had passed various bilious, overgrown fortunes accumulated in the golden East, gave his voice for India. Mr. Foreman, whose brother had grown comfortably rich, on the shores of that river "Plate," whose very name in mercantile mouths, seems to savour so pleasantly of golden harvests, spoke strongly in favour of South America. Mr. Foreman had been consulting with his minister, of whose business head, and clear judgment, the good lawyer was becomingly proud, and slightly given to boast himself; and it happened that, at that very time, Mr. Lumsden had heard from his brother, the clever manager and future junior partner of Messrs. Sutor and Sinclair's great commercial house in Glasgow, that Mr. Sinclair, the partner in Buenos Ayres, was in urgent want of an intelligent and well-educated clerk, and had written to his partner and manager, desiring them, either to send one of the young men in their Glasgow office, or to employ one of higher qualifications, if need were, and send him out without delay. Now it happened, wrote Mr. Lumsden's brother, that the house of Sutor and Sinclair had

divers other branches, in different parts of the world, and their clerks of experience having been drafted, one by one, to these, they were now left with none of sufficient age, or acquirements, to suit the fastidious Mr. Sinclair, whose letter had conveyed a delicate hint, that if it were possible, he should desire a young man of some culture and breeding to fill the vacant post. Mr. Lumsden's brother further explained, that this was a quiet stroke at the less polished Mr. Sutor, who had previously sent a clerkship, in the shape of a great, hearty, joyous, enterprising cub, of true Glasgow manufacture and proportions, born to make a fortune, but, unfortunately, not born either to be or look anything beyond the honest, genial, persevering, money-making man he already was. Mr. Sinclair's health was delicate; his mind, considering that he was a clever and very successful merchant, pre-eminently so; and the choice of his confidential clerk, puzzled Mr. George Lumsden and his principal sadly.

Mr. Foreman, on hearing of this, had written without delay to his minister's brother, desiring to know whether poor Archibald—the ruined Laird—might have any chance of suiting so

peculiar a situation. His name, Mr. Foreman wrote somewhat proudly, was a sufficient voucher for his personal acquirements; he had been unfortunate, but the youthful madness which occasioned these misfortunes had been bitterly repented of, and there was little doubt that his ability, and earnest endeavour to redeem his lost ground, would carry him to the head of whatever he attempted. When Mr. Fergusson and Archibald entered Mr. Foreman's private room, they found him waiting in nervous expectation for an answer to this letter. He knew the mail had come in; he had despatched a messenger to the post-office half an hour ago, and was fuming now over the vexatious delay. In the meantime, however, he managed to explain the matter to his visitors.

"From all that I can hear, Mr. Archibald, it is just the thing for you—without office drudging, and with a man who could understand and sympathize with your feelings. I do think we have been fortunate in hearing of it."

Archibald shook his head. "You are too ambitious for me, Mr. Foreman. I would rather—it may be a sort of pride, perhaps,

though pride sits ill on me—I would, indeed, rather not have my feelings sympathized with by strangers. I should prefer no manner of distinction."

"Well, well!" said Mr. Foreman, "neither there will be; only the situation is a superior one, and you would have in it the best possible opening."

"Don't think me ungrateful," said Archibald. "I shall be very glad of it, if you think me at all likely to have the necessary qualifications. But in business, you know, I want experience entirely. I almost want even elementary knowledge."

"No fear of that," said Mr. Fergusson, "a good head and clear mind soon master the details of business—but India!"

"Ah! has the little wretch come back at last?" cried Mr. Foreman, darting into the outer office, and seizing upon his messenger, who, lingering only to watch the progress of one most interesting game at "bools," which came to a crisis just as he was passing, had returned from the post-office with his load of letters. These were examined in a moment; one bearing the square Glasgow post-mark se-

lected, the others tossed over in an indiscriminate heap to Walter, and Mr. Foreman, opening his letter hurriedly, re-entered the room reading it. It was decidedly favourable. Much of sympathy and compassion for the young man shipwrecked so early, much of regret for the downfall of an old house (for Mr. Lumsden was a north countryman, and knew the Sutherland family by name) were in it: but these Mr. Foreman kept to himself. The prudent manager of Messrs. Sutor and Sinclair's Glasgow house, was rather dubious, as to a young man, who had managed to ruin himself at five-and-twenty, being quite a suitable person for a merchant's trusted and confidential clerk; but proposed that Mr. Sutherland should come, for a month or two, to the Glasgow counting-house, to acquire a knowledge of the business, and enable them to form a better judgment of him, on personal knowledge. Mr. Lumsden's words were quite kind, and perfectly respectful, yet Mr. Foreman delicately softened them as he read, and when he had concluded, looked triumphantly from Archibald to Mr. Fergusson.

"Well, gentlemen; what do you say?"

The factor gave in his adhesion; his own vague hope from India could not stand before a definite proposal like this. "It looks well, Mr. Archibald; upon my word, I do think it looks well."

"It is quite above my expectations," said Archibald. "I am perfectly ready to enter upon my probation at once—without delay. I accept your friend's offer without the least hesitation, Mr. Foreman; write him, I beg, and tell him so, and let the time be fixed for the commencement of my apprenticeship—and then, if I satisfy my new employers—then, for the shores of that luxurious Spain in the west, and such prosperity as Providence shall send me there. Nay, nay; you look sorrowfully at me, as if I mocked myself; I do not—my second beginning is more hopeful than my first. I will do no dishonour—I trust—I hope I shall do no further dishonour to your kindness, or my father's name; only let us have it settled upon, and begun as early as possible, Mr. Foreman. I have no time to lose."

"I am glad! I am delighted!" exclaimed the honest lawyer, "to see you take it so well. If the first disagreeables were but over!"

"Never mind the first disagreeables, Mr. Foreman," said Archibald, cheerfully. "I shall be the better of difficulties to begin with—if I only were begun."

"We will not linger about that," said Mr. Foreman, catching the contagion of his client's cheerfulness, which, to tell the truth, was more in seeming than reality. "I shall write to Mr. Lumsden at once."

Other arrangements had to be made before they left Portoran—the transfer of Alexander Semple's lease to Mr. Fergusson being the principal matter which occupied them. Semple was a soft, spiritless man, of indolent temper; and no enterprise, and the bleak, unprofitable acres were certain to remain as unprofitable and bleak as ever during his occupancy. Already many times Mr. Coulter had sighed over them, and poured into the ears of their listless tenant vain hints, and unheeded remonstrances. Mr. Coulter was most pleasantly busied now devising the means for their fertilization, and, in company with Mr. Fergusson, had already taken various very long, wearisome, and delightful walks, partly from a neighbourly regard for the interests of the broken man, and partly from his own entire

devotion to his respectable and most important science, advising with the new farmer as to the various profitable and laborious processes necessary for these unpromising and barren fields. The rental Archibald Sutherland insisted should remain in the factor's hands, or in Mr. Foreman's hands, or in the Portoran branch of the British Linen Company's Bank, if his zealous friends insisted on that, his own resolution being to spend nothing beyond the income he worked for, however small that might be at first. His own tastes had always been simple, and money—the mere bits of gold and scraps of paper—had become precious in his eyes. There was little fear either that he should ever be a worshipper of the golden calf—the unrighteous Mammon. But Strathoran—his home—his birth-place—the house of his fathers!

He saw its turrets rising from among the trees as he turned his horse's head from the pleasant threshold of Woodsmuir, to which he now paid his first visit. These fair slopes and hollows, the brown moor running far northward, the gray hills in the distance, with the red glory of the frosty January sunlight on their bare, uncovered heads. What were they now to

him? What? Dearer, more precious than ever; the aim to which he looked forward through a dim vista of hard-working years; a prize to be won; a goal to be attained; a treasure to be bought by his own toil! Was there no sickening of the heart, as the young man, born and nurtured in that proud old house of Strathoran, the heir of all its inherited honours, looked forward to the lifetime of toil that lay before him, obscure, ignoble, unceasing? The office in Glasgow where he should be put on trial, and have the strange new experience of unknown masters, on whose favour depended all his prospects; the still more dim and unknown counting-house of Buenos Ayres, with its exile and estrangement from home-looks and language. Was not his heart sickening within him? No! Who that has felt his pulses quicken, and his heart beat, at the anticipation of a clear and honourable future, filled only with unencumbered labour, a healthful frame, a sound mind, and a great aim in view, could ask that question? Sickness, deadly and painful, overpowered Archibald Sutherland's heart when he looked *behind;* that wild lee-shore of weakness, those fierce rocks of temptation and passion upon

which his fortune and his honour had made disastrous shipwreck. These are the things to sicken hearts and crush them, not the bracing chill air that swept the path to which he began to bind his breast. The hill was steep, the way long, rough, laborious. What matter? There was hope, and mental health, and moral safety in his toils; a definite aim at its summit; an All-guiding Providence, giving strength to the toiler, and promising a blessing upon every righteous effort, to uphold and bear him on.

The cloud that had passed over that little, blue-eyed, gentle girl at the Tower—the new interest which occupied the mind of Mrs. Catherine, were known to Archibald in some degree, and interested him deeply. But the great secret—that Norman lived yet to be toiled, and hoped, and prayed for—was not communicated to either Archibald or Alice. They knew only that their friends believed him unjustly accused, and intended to labour for proof of that—proof which might be difficult enough to find, after the lapse of so many years—but the fact of the engagement between Lewis and Alice, was quite sufficient to account for the

suddenly awakened anxiety concerning Norman's innocence.

The first week of the new year was past: the next day little Alice was to return home. They were all sitting in Mrs. Catherine's inner drawing-room, about her cheerful tea-table—Mrs. Catherine herself, Alice, Anne, Archibald, and Lewis. The spirits of the young people had risen; they were all hopeful, courageous, and conversing with that intimate and familiar kindliness which unites so much more closely and tenderly on the eve of a parting than at any other time. Alice was to sing to them—to sing as Anne and Archibald begged—that song of the 'Oran' which had moved them so deeply on the night of the new year. The sweet young voice had grown more expressive since that time; the gentle, youthful spirit had passed through greater vicissitudes in that week than in all its previous bright lifetime, and, therefore, the song was better rendered—its tinge of sadness—its warm breath of hope—

"Ah, pray, young hearts, for the sad wayfaring man!"

Anne met Archibald's eyes with a supplicat-

ing glance in them as the melody ended. Her own were wet with sympathetic tears. Yes, for him who must count so many years of toil before he could see the evening star rise calm on the home-waves of Oran, she echoed the prayer, but more deeply, and with a thrill of still devouter earnestness, for that exiled brother who already had borne the burden of the long, laborious day, so far from home and all its comforts, so far from hope and honour.

Alice sang again, a pretty little pastoral song of the district, which was a favourite with Lewis. He was leaning over her chair, and Anne, approaching Mrs. Catherine, took the opportunity of asking her about this ballad—whether it really had any connexion with Norman, or was but linked to him, by her own fancy.

"It is Norman's song," said Mrs. Catherine. "Ye ken, Gowan, that I like ballads that have the breath of life in them. Langsyne, Norman left that with me; the author of it was some student lad, about Redheugh, that he liked well, and it has lain bye me ever since. I desired the bairn Alison to learn it. I am an auld fuil to heed such bairnly things, Gowan; but it pleased me to hear her father's daughter singing that.

There was a kind of forgiveness and peace in it to the memory of the unhappy callant. It was a daftlike fancy, was it no, for an auld wife? But whisht! let us hear her."

And so, next morning, little Alice, very sadly, and with many tears, went away; Lewis and Anne accompanying her to Portoran. Alice wore a little ring of betrothal upon her slender finger, and carried with her a letter from Mrs. Catherine, stating all the circumstances of her engagement, and their conviction that they could prove to Mrs. Aytoun's satisfaction the innocence of Norman. It had been thought best that Lewis should not write himself, until Mrs. Catherine had explained his peculiar position to the mother and brother of Alice; and they had arranged that he should follow her, very shortly, to Edinburgh, to present himself to her family, and urge his suit in person.

Very sad also was the leave-taking of Bessie and her friends at the Tower. Johnnie Halflin had bought a pretty little silk handkerchief for her, which Bessie, in simple fidelity, vowed never to part with. Jacky had bestowed a book, and some very beautiful moss, from a gray, old tombstone in the graveyard on Oranside, which,

tradition said, covered the last resting-place of the heroine of an old, pathetic ballad, current in the countryside. Bessie let the book slide thanklessly to the bottom of her little "kist," and was sadly at a loss what to do with the moss, which, however, was finally thrust into the same repository. Poor Jacky had chosen her parting presents unhappily.

And at last, they were away. The frost had broken, through the night, and it was another of those dull, drizzling, melancholy winter days. Lewis placed Alice, carefully wrapped up, and protected from the cold, in the corner of the same coach in which she had seen him first. Little Bessie was seated by her side, and leaving the Tower and all its pleasant neighbourhood lying dark behind her, Alice Aytoun was whirled away home.

It cost her no inconsiderable amount of exertion and self-denial to have the tears and sadness sufficiently overcome to meet her mother's greeting as she wished to do. But Alice schooled herself bravely, like a little hero, and conquered. They were home, in the old familiar room, by the well-known fireside. Mrs. Aytoun was smiling, as she had not smiled before since Alice

went away. James was half-ashamed of being so unusually joyous. They had all her news to hear, all her three months' history over again, in spite of the long recording letters.

"And what is this?" said Mrs. Aytoun, taking her daughter's small white hand, upon which glittered the little token ring. "Is this another of those delicate gifts of Mrs. Catherine's?"

Little Alice could not answer; the blood flushed over her face and neck. She stammered and trembled. Mrs. Aytoun looked at her, in alarm and wonder.

"Read this letter, mother," whispered Alice, at last, putting Mrs. Catherine's letter into her mother's hands, and sinking upon a stool at her feet. "It will tell you all."

James had left the room, a minute before. Mrs. Aytoun, somewhat agitated, opened the letter, and Alice laid her head upon her mother's knee, and hid it in the folds of her dress. Mrs. Aytoun read:

"I herewith send back to you, kinswoman, your pleasant bairn, who has been a great comfort and solace to me, though my old house was maybe too dark a cage for a singing-bird like

her. I am by no means confident either whether I will ever undertake the charge of any such dangerous gear again; for in the ordinary course of nature, the bit gay spirit and bonnie face of her have been making mischief in Strathoran; and besides having my door besieged by all manner of youthful company, there is one lad, who, I am feared, has crossed my threshold too often, maybe, for your good pleasure.

"The lad is Lewis Ross, of Merkland, a callant of good outward appearance and competent estate, with no evil condition that I can specially note about him, except having arrived at that full period of years, when it is the fashion of young men to give themselves credit for more wisdom than any other mortal person can see. In other things, so far as I can judge, the two are well enough matched; for Lewis is the representative of a family long settled in the countryside, and has his lands free of any burden or encumbrance, besides being in all matters of this world a prudent, sensible, and managing lad.

"I would have put in a reservation, however, till your pleasure was known, but doubtless the deliberate ways of age differ from the swift proceedings of youthheid; and the two had thirled

themselves beyond power of redemption, before I had any inkling of the matter. I see no good way of stopping it now, and I think ye may trust your Burd Alice in the hands of Lewis Ross, without fear.

"And now, kinswoman, there comes a graver and darker matter into the consideration. I will not ask ye if ye mind the beginning of your widowhood. It is pain and grief to me to say a word that may bring that terrible season back to ye, even in the remembrance; only it has so happened, in the wonderful course of Providence, that it should have an unhappy connection with the troth-plighting of these two bairns. Kinswoman, ye are younger than me, and have seen less of this world's miseries, though your own wierd has not been light. But what think ye of a young man, in the bloom of his years and his hopes, with a pleasant heritage and a fair name, suddenly covered with the shame and dishonour of a great crime—threatened with a shameful death—exposed to the hatred of all men, that bore the love of God and their neighbours in honest hearts,— and him innocent withal? What think you of a lad—generous, upright, honourable—as aefauld and single-

minded a callant as the eye of day ever looked upon, suddenly plunged into a horror of darkness like this—kenning himself everywhere condemned, yet, in his true and honest heart, kenning himself guiltless? I say, what think ye of this? Was there ever a darker or more terrible doom, in this world of ills and mysteries?

"I knew him—kinswoman, from his birth-year to the time of his blight, I kent this unhappy callant: the truthfulness of him—the honouring of others above himself, that was inherent in his simple, manly nature—the strength of gentleness and patience, that might have been crowning an old and wise head, instead of being yoked with the impetuous spirit of youth! All this I kent; and yet, painfully and slowly, I also was permitted to believe that his pure hand had blood upon it—that he had done this crime.

"My e'en are opened. I am humbled to the ground in my rejoicing, that I should have dared, even in my own secret spirit, to malign the gracious nature I kent so well. Kinswoman, the violent death of your husband, by whom or wherefore done I know not, brought this sore

doom undeserved upon Norman Rutherford. The bridal tryst of your pleasant bairn Alice, will clear his dishonoured name again.

" Ye think he killed your husband. I am not given to hasty judgment, nor am I easy misguided. He did not do it; and when I tell you that your bairn Alison is plighted to a near kinsman of Norman Rutherford's, I lay my charge upon ye, no to let your heart sink within you, or suffer the bairn's bit gentle spirit to be broken again. I pledge ye my word, that they will seek no further consent from ye, till Norman's righteousness is clear to your eyes as the morning light. There are two urgent reasons pressing them—I am meaning Lewis Ross, and his sister, my own Gowan—on this work; the winning of your pleasant bairn, and the clearing of their brother's lost fame and honour.

" For he is their brother, their nearest kin. Again, I charge ye, think of this terrible doom laid upon a callant of as clear and lofty a spirit as ever was in mortal ken or knowlege; and let the mother's heart within ye have compassion on his name. Shut not your mind against the proof—it may be hard to gather—and

take time and patience; but if mortal hands can compass it, it shall be laid before ye soon or syne.

"Lewis Ross (trusting ye will receive him) will shortly tell ye of this himself, with his own lips; and having maybe some right of counsel, in virtue of my years, and of our kindred, it is my prayer to you that ye put no discouragement in his way.

"Be content to wait till the proof is brought to ye; and break not the gentle spirit of the bairn, by crossing her in the first tenderness of her youth.

"CATHERINE DOUGLAS."

Mrs. Aytoun was greatly agitated. James had entered the room, and stood in silent astonishment, as he looked at Alice clinging to her mother's knee, and the letter trembling in Mrs. Aytoun's hand. "Mother—Alice—what has happened? What is the matter?"

Mrs. Aytoun handed the letter to him in silence, and, lifting her daughter up, drew her close to her breast: "My Alice! my poor, simple bairn! why did I let you away from me?"

The girl clung to her mother, terrified, ashamed, and dizzy. She trembled to hear some fatal sentence, parting her for ever from Lewis. She fancied she could never lift up her blushing face again, to speak of him, even if that terror were withdrawn: she could only lean on that kind breast, and cling, as is the nature of such gentle, dependent spirits. Anne Ross's words were true. Had Mrs. Aytoun but said that she must never see Lewis again, poor little Alice would have submitted without a struggle, and would have been right; she was safe in that wise guidance—she was not safe in her own.

But Mrs. Aytoun's motherly lips gave forth no such arbitrary mandate. She rose, still holding Alice within her arm. "James," she said, "that letter is a most important one: read it carefully. We will join you again by-and-by."

And leading and supporting her drooping daughter, Mrs. Aytoun went to her own room, and, seating herself there, began to question Alice.

And then the whole stream came flowing forth, hesitating and broken; how Lewis had

travelled with her, and had been constantly at her side, ever since that momentous journey; how Anne had been her patient, kind, indulgent friend; how at last, upon that eventful New-year's night, Lewis and herself had been alone together—and then—and then—there followed some incoherent words, which Mrs. Aytoun could comprehend the purport of; how Anne came in, looking so chill and pale, and horror-stricken; how Mrs. Catherine next day took her into the little room, and almost broke the gentle heart that was beating so high now, with anxiety and suspense; how Anne returned at night with voice as tender and hand as gentle as her mother's, telling her that Norman was innocent; and then, how glad and happy they had all been together again—and then—if her mother could only see him—if she could only see Anne—they could tell her so much better!

Mrs. Aytoun was still anxious and pale, but her tremor of agitation was quieted.

"She must be a very kind, good girl, this Anne, Alice."

Alice breathed more freely—if her mother had been very angry, was her simple reasoning, she would not have spoken so.

"She is very good—very kind, mother—like you, gentler than Mrs. Catherine; but she is not a girl, she is older than—than Lewis."

Mrs. Aytoun smiled.

"How old is Lewis?"

The simple little heart began to beat with troubled joy.

"He is twenty-one, mother. It was his birthday just a week after I went to the Tower."

Mrs. Aytoun did not speak for some time.

"Alice," she said at last, "I must see this Lewis, and consult with James, before I make any decision—in the meantime you will be very patient, will you not?"

"Oh, yes, yes—I do not care how long—only—if you saw him, mother, if you just saw him, I know how you would like him!"

"Would I?" said Mrs. Aytoun, smiling: "well, we shall see; but now dry your eyes, and let us go back to James again."

They returned to the parlour. James sat at the table, the letter lying before him, and his face exceedingly grave. He was very much disturbed and troubled. He did not well see what to do.

For some time there was little conversation

between them—the mother and son consulted together with their grave looks. Little Alice, again sadly cast down, sat silent by the fireside. At last her brother addressed her with a sort of timidity, blushing almost as she did herself, when he mentioned the name.

"Alice, when does Mr. Ross come to Edinburgh?"

Mr. Ross! so cold it sounded and icy—would not Lewis be his brother?

"In a fortnight," murmured Alice.

"A fortnight! then, mother, I think my best plan is to go down to Strathoran myself and make inquiries. In a matter which involves two such important things as the happiness of Alice, and the honour of our family, there is no time for delay. I shall start tomorrow."

"Can you spare the time?" said his mother —while Alice looked up half-glad, half-sorrowful—it might keep Lewis from coming to Edinburgh—at the same time, James was so sure to be convinced by Lewis's irresistible eloquence, and the gentler might of Anne.

"I must spare it, mother," was the answer,

" my ordinary business is not so important as this. What do you think—am I right?"

" Perfectly right, James," said his mother, promptly, " I was about to advise this myself; and if you find anything satisfactory to report, you can bid this Lewis still come. I shall want to see who it is, who has superseded me in my little daughter's heart."

" Oh, no, mother—no, no," cried Alice, imploringly. " Do not say that."

James Aytoun rose, and laid his hand caressingly upon his little sister's fair hair. She had been a child when he was rising into manhood. He thought her a child still—and with the grave difficulties of this very unexpected problem, which they had to solve, there mingled a half-mirthful, half-sad, sort of incredulous wonder. Little Alice had done a very important piece of business, independently and alone. Little Alice had the sober glory of matronhood hanging over her fair, girlish forehead. Little Alice was engaged!

CHAPTER II.

"Nay, let us see no lingering—
Patience itself becomes a sin, when yoked
With sloth. Be patient when thy soul is taxed
To its stout utmost: do thy labour bravely,
And in thy toil be patient. Only thus
Is the still virtue noble."

OLD PLAY.

SEVERAL days before Alice left the Tower, Lewis had written to Robert Fergusson, the youthful Edinburgh advocate, of whose very early call to the bar his father was so justly and pleasantly proud, telling him all they knew and guessed of Norman's history, except the one circumstance of his escape from the shipwreck; and explaining, in some slight degree, the imme-

diate reason of their anxiety to clear their brother's name from the foul blot that lay upon it. Very shortly after Alice Aytoun's departure, an answer came to the letter of Lewis.

With quick interest, partly in that it was one of the first cases in which his legal wisdom had been consulted, and partly from the kindly feeling of neighbourship, which is so warm in Scotland, the young lawyer embraced the search, and promised to go down instantly to the parish in which the deed was done, or even to engage the assistance of an acute writer, of experience in his craft, if Lewis thought that desirable. Mr. Robert, however, with a young man's abundant confidence in his own power, fancied that he could accomplish the work quite as well alone. "He would go down quietly to the village," he said, "taking care to do nothing which might put the true criminal, if he still lived, upon his guard; and as soon as he had procured any information, would report it to Lewis."

The letter was satisfactory—the warm readiness of belief in Norman's innocence pleased Anne. In such a matter, however strong one's own faith may be, it is a great satisfaction to hear it echoed by other minds.

In the afternoon of that day, Anne went, by appointment, to the Tower, to communicate Robert's opinion to Mrs. Catherine. She made a circuit by the Mill, to see Lilie; for Mrs. Catherine and Archibald, she knew, had business in Portoran, and would not return early. It was a clear, bright, mild day, with a spring haze of subdued sunshine about it, reminding one, pleasantly, that the year "was on the turn." Lilie was not at home.

"And I wish ye would speak to that outre lassie, Jacky Morison, Miss Anne," said Lilie's careful guardian. "She had the bairn away this morning, amaist before her parritch were suppit, and trails her about to a' kinds of out o' the way places; in the wood, and on the hills; and I'm no sure in my ain mind, that it's right to lippen a wean wi' the like o' her."

"Jacky is sure to be very careful," said Anne.

"Na, it's no sae muckle for that," said Mrs. Melder; "though I *have* a cauld tremble whiles when I think o' the water. Jacky's no oncarefu. It's a great charge being answerable for a stranger bairn, Miss Anne; but Lilie's learning (it's just a pleasure to see how fast she wins on)

a' manner o' fuil ballants, and nonsense verses; and has her bit head fu' of stories o' knights and fairies, and I kenna a' what. It's Jacky's doing, and no ither. I am whiles far frae easy in my mind about it."

"No fear," said Anne, smiling. "Jacky will do Lilie no harm, Mrs. Melder."

"To be sure," said Mrs. Melder, thoughtfully, "she's no an ill scholar, to be sic a strange lassie; and has been lookit gey weel after at the Tower. She was here the other day, when the minister was in—that's Mr. Lumsden—he had a diet* in my house, Miss Anne—and it wad have dune ye gude to have heard her at the questions. No a slip; and as easy in the petitions as in man's chief end. They say," continued Mrs. Melder, somewhat overpowered, "that she can say the hundred and nineteenth psalm a' out, without missing a word."

Leaving the miller's kindly wife a good deal reassured by these signs of Jacky's orthodoxy,

* A diet of examination. One of the periodical visits made by Scottish clergymen in former times, during which the household, and especially its younger members, were examined on the "Shorter Catechism," the universal text-book of Scottish Theology.

Anne proceeded towards the Tower. The high-road was circuitous, and long; and the direct and universally-used path ran along the northern bank of the river, through the grounds of Strathoran. The little green gate, near which Alice had met Mr. Fitzherbert, was at the opposite extremity of this by-way, where it entered the precincts of the Tower. As she drew near the stile, at which the narrow path was admitted into the possessions of the fallen house of Sutherland, Anne heard voices before her. One of them, whose loud tone was evidently full of anger and excitement, she recognised at once as Marjory Falconer's; and having heard of her former adventure with Mr. Fitzherbert, and gallant defence of little Alice, Anne hurried forward, fearing that her friend's prompt ire, and impetuous disposition, had involved her in some new scrape. It was evident that Marjory had some intention, in raising her voice so high. Anne could hear its clear tone, and indignant modulation, before she came in sight of the speaker.

"He would venture to take the airs of a chieftain upon him—he, an English interloper, a mushroom lord! Pull away the branches,

George: never mind, let them indict you for tresspass if they dare."

Anne had quickened her pace, and was now close to the stile. Miss Falconer, her face flushed, her strong, tall, handsome figure swelling stronger and taller than ever, as she pulled, with an arm not destitute of force, one great branch which had been placed with many others, across the stile, barring the passage, stood with her head turned towards Strathoran, too much engrossed to notice Anne's approach. The Falcon's Craig groom was labouring with all his might to clear away the other obstructions, his broad face illuminated with fun, and hot with exertion, enjoying it with his whole heart. Miss Falconer went on:

"A pretty person to shut us out of our own country—to eject our cottars—honester men a hundredfold than himself; a chief forsooth! does he think himself a chief? I would like to see the clan of Gillravidge. Pull away these barriers, George: if Mrs. Catherine does not try conclusions with him, I do not know her."

"Marjory," said Anne, "what are you doing?—what is the matter now?"

"Anne Ross, is that you?—the matter!—

why, look here—here is matter enough to make any one angry—*our* road, that belonged to us and our ancestors before this man's race or name had ever been heard of—look at it, how he has blocked it up—look at this 'notice to trespassers'—'to be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law'—very well, let them prosecute!" continued Marjory, raising her voice, and sending a flashing, keen glance towards a corner of the adjoining plantation, "let them prosecute by all means—in five minutes more, they shall have some trespassers. These paltry little tyrants—these upstart Englishmen, daring, in a lowland country, and on poor Archibald Sutherland's lands, to do what a highland chief* would not venture on, on his own hills!"

"It must be some mistake, Marjory," said Anne, "it is impossible any one could do this with the intention of insulting the whole countryside. It must be a mistake."

"Mistake, indeed!—throw it into the Oran, George, throw it over the water," cried Miss Falconer, as the groom raised in his arms an immense piece of wood, the last barrier to the

* Spoken before the era of his Grace of Athol.

passage. "We shall see that by-and-by—come, Anne."

Marjory mounted the stile, and sprang down in the Strathoran grounds on the other side. "Come, Anne, come."

"Had we not better go the other way?" said Anne. "It is but subjecting ourselves to impertinence, Marjory. Nay, do not look contemptuous. I am not afraid of accompanying you, but I do think that Lewis and Ralph might manage this better than we can."

Marjory threw back her head with an indignant, impatient motion. "Don't be a fool, Anne. Come, I am going to the Tower. Lewis and Ralph indeed!"

"Well," said Anne, "if they could not do it better, it would be at least more suitable. We shall only expose ourselves to impertinence, Marjory. Let us go round the other way."

"Very well," said Miss Falconer, turning away; "I will go alone."

Anne crossed the stile. It was annoying to be forced into any altercation, such as was almost sure to ensue upon their meeting any of the dependents of Lord Gillravidge; at the same time, she could not suffer Marjory to go alone.

George lifted a large, empty basket, and followed them, his hot, merry face shining like a beacon as he passed beneath the bare and rustling boughs.

Miss Falconer, with the large basket full, had been visiting a widow, whose only son had met with a severe accident, while engaged in his ordinary labour. The widow had some claim on the household of Falcon's Craig—some one of those most pleasant and beneficial links of mutual goodwill and service which unite country neighbourhoods so healthfully, subsisted between the poor family and the great one, and as, on any grand occasion at Falcon's Craig, the brisk services of Tibbie Hewit, the hapless young mason's mother, would have been rendered heartily and at once, so the accident was no sooner reported to Miss Falconer, than she set out with her share of the mutual kindliness. We cannot tell what was in the basket, but Tibbie Hewit's "press" was very much better filled when it went away empty, than when Miss Falconer entered her cottage.

"What a pity I have not my whip," said Marjory, as, drawing Anne's arm within her own, they passed on together. "You should have seen that cowardly fellow who stopped little Alice! what a grimace he made when he felt

the lash about his shoulders! I say, Anne,"—Miss Falconer's voice sank lower—"did you see them hiding in the wood?"

"Who, Marjory?"

"Oh! that ape with the hair about his face, and some more of them. I should not have pulled down their barricade, I dare say, if I had not seen them. But you do not think I would retreat for *them?*"

"I do think, indeed," said Anne, looking hastily round, "that retreat would be by far our most dignified plan. Suppose they come down to us, Marjory, and we, who call ourselves gentlewomen, get involved in a squabble with a set of impertinent young men. I do think we are subjecting ourselves to quite unnecessary humiliation."

A violent flush covered Marjory Falconer's face—one of those overpowing rebounds of the strained delicacy and womanliness which revenged her *escapades* so painfully—the burning colour might have furnished a hundred fluttering blushes for little Alice Aytoun. But still she had no idea of yielding.

"Perhaps you are right, Anne. I did not think of that; but at least we must go on now. And think what an insult it is!—to all of us—

to the whole country, We cannot suffer it, you know. Mrs. Catherine, I am sure, will take steps immediately."

"Very likely," said Anne.

Anne was revolving the possibility of crossing the Oran by the stepping-stones, which were about a quarter of a mile along, and so escaping the collision she dreaded.

"There, you see!" exclaimed Marjory, triumphantly; "there is a proof of the way we are dealt with, the indignities they put upon women! Neither Lewis nor Ralph would have the public spirit to resist such a thing as this. Oh! I can answer for Ralph, and I know Lewis would not. But one can be quite sure of Mrs. Catherine—one is never disappointed in her. Yet you will hear silly boys sneer at her, and think her estate would be better in their feeble hands, than in her own strong ones. I ask you, what do you think of that, Anne Ross — can you see no injustice there?"

"Injustice?" said Anne, laughing. "No, indeed, only a great deal of foolishness and nonsense; both on the part of the silly boys, and—I beg your pardon, Marjory—on yours,

for taking the trouble of repeating what they say."

"Oh, very well!" said Miss Falconer, colouring still more violently, yet, with characteristic obstinacy plunging on in the expression of her pet opinions. "Yes! I know you think me very unwomanly; you pretend to be proper, Anne Ross—to set that sweet confection of gentleness, and mildness, and dependence, which people call a perfect woman, up as your model; but it's all a cheat, I tell you! You ought to try to be weak and pretty, and instead of that, you are only grave and sensible. You ought to be clinging to Lewis, as sweet and timid as possible; instead of that, you are very independent, and not much given, I fancy, to consulting your younger brother. You're not true, Anne Ross; you think with me, and are only quiet to cover it."

"Hush!" said Anne; "do not be so very profane, Marjory. Do you remember how the Apostle describes it; those words that charm one's ear like music, 'the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.' Are not the very sounds beautiful? Mildness and gentleness are exceeding good things; but I do not set any

sweet confection before me, for my model. Marjory! do you remember those other beautiful words: 'Strength and honour are her clothing; she opens her mouth with wisdom, and in her lips is the law of kindness?' There is nothing weak about that, and yet that seems to me a perfectly womanly woman."

Marjory Falconer did not answer.

"But I feel quite sure," said Anne, smiling, "that when she opened her mouth with wisdom, she never said a word about the rights of women; and that when her husband went out to the gate, to sit among the elders, she did not think her own position, sitting among her maidens, a whit less dignified and important than his, or envied him in any way indeed. When you are tempted, Marjory, with this favourite heresy of yours, read that beautiful poem—there is not a morsel of confectionery about it; you can see the woman, whose household was clad in scarlet, and whose children rose up and called her blessed, and know her a living person, as truly as you know yourself. You call me quiet, Marjory; I intend to be demonstrative to-day, at least, and I do utterly contemn and abominate all that

rubbish of rights of women, and woman's mission, and woman's influence, and all the rest of it; I never hear these cant words, but I blush for them," and Anne did blush, deeply as she spoke; "we are one half of the world—we have our work to do, like the other half—let us do our work as honourably and wisely as we can, but for pity's sake, do not let us make this mighty bustle and noise about it. We have our own strength, and honour, and dignity—no one disputes it; but dignity, and strength, and honour, Marjory, are things to live in us, not to be talked about; only do not let us be so thoroughly self-conscious—no one gains respect by claiming it. There! you are very much astonished and horror-stricken at my burst. I cannot help it."

"Very well! very well!" exclaimed Miss Falconer, clapping her hands. "Utterly contemn and abominate! Hear, hear, hear! who could have believed it of quiet Anne Ross?"

Anne laughed. "Quiet Anne Ross is about to dare something further, Marjory. See; when did you cross the stepping-stones?"

They had reached them; three or four large, smooth stones, lay across the stream, at a point

where it narrowed; the middle one was a great block of native marble, which had been there, firm in its centre, since ever the brown Oran was a living river. The passage was by no means perilous, except for people to whom a wet shoe was a great evil. It is not commonly so with youthful people in the country; it was a matter of the most perfect unconcern to Marjory Falconer.

"When did I cross the stepping-stones? Not for a good twelvemonth. I challenge you, Anne; if we should stumble, there is no one to see us but George. Come along."

And Marjory, in the close-fitting, dark-cloth pelisse, which her old maid at Falcon's Craig congratulated herself "could take no scather," leaped lightly from stone to stone, across the placid, clear, brown water. Anne, rejoicing in the success of her scheme, followed. So did George, somewhat disappointed, at losing the expected fun, of a rencontre with "some o' the feckless dandy chaps at Strathoran," and the demolition of the barricade at the other end of the way.

They had to make a considerable circuit before they reached the road; but Anne endured

that joyfully, when she saw through the trees the hirsute Mr. Fitzherbert, and some of his companions, assembled about the second stile—Marjory saw them too—the deep blush of shame returned to her cheek in overpowering pain: she did not say anything, but did not feel the less for that. Did Anne, indeed, need to scheme, for the preservation of her dignity?

Little Lilie came running forth from Mrs. Euphan Morison's room, to meet them, as they crossed the bridge. Lilie had wonderful stories to tell of her long rambles with Jacky. The delicate moss on the tomb of the legendary maiden, in the graveyard of Oranside, received more admiration from the child's quick sense of beauty, than it could elicit from the commonplace mind of Bessie; for Lilie thought the graveyard was "an awfu' still place—nae sound but the water rinning, slow—slow; and the branches gaun wave, wave; and the leaves on the wind's feet, like the bonnie shoon the fairies wear; and a' the folk lying quiet in their graves."

They were lingering without—the air was so very mild and balmy, as if some summer angel had broken the spell of winter for one day.

Marjory leant against a tree; her clear, good face, more thoughtful than usual. Anne had seated herself on a stone seat, beside the threshhold, and was bending over Lilie, and her handful of moss; while Jacky, like a brown elf, as she was called, hovered in the rear. Mrs. Catherine had not yet returned from Portoran.

"If ye please will ye go in?" asked Jacky.

"No, let us stay here, Anne," said Miss Falconer. "Jacky, how did Mrs. Catherine go?"

"If ye please, she's in the phaeton," said Jacky.

"In the phaeton? oh!" exclaimed Miss Falconer, in a tone of disappointment; "and those steady wretches of ponies—there is no chance of anything happening to them—there is no hope of them running away."

"Hope, Marjory?" said Anne.

"Yes, hope! If Mrs. Catherine could only be caught in that shut-up by-way herself. Anne, I would give anything, just to find her in it."

"Here she comes," said Anne, as the comfortable brown equipage, and its brisk ponies, came smartly up towards the door, driven by

Archibald Sutherland. "Ask her to walk to the little gate with you, Marjory—she will do it. But be careful not to speak of it before Archibald."

"Thank you for the caution," said Miss Falconer, in an under-tone. "I wont; but I had forgotten—"

The vehicle drew up. Mrs. Catherine alighted, and, at Marjory's request, turned with her to the little gate, from the shady dim lane beyond which the barricaded stile was visible, which shut passengers out from the sacred enclosure of Strathoran.

Archibald sat down on the stone seat at the threshold, by Anne's side. Lilie was very talkative—she had seen the little ruined chapel on Oranside for the first time that day.

"There's grass upon the steps," said Lilie, "and they're broken—and then up high it's a' gray, but the branches, and they're like the lang arms of the brown spirits on the muir that Jacky kens about. Ye would think they had hands waving—"

Anne patted the child's head, bidding her describe this at another time; but Lilie was i' the vein.

" And upon the wall there's something white, printed in letters like a book—and down below, Oh, ye dinna ken what I found!—Jacky's got it. It was a wee, wee blue flower, growing in a corner, where it could see naithing but the sky. Would that be the way it was blue?"

Anne could give no satisfactory answer, and Lilie went on.

" Jacky was to keep it for me, but I'll give it to you, because it's bonnie—like the Oran, in the gloaming, when the sky's shining in the water. There's no flower but it—no—" said Lilie, comprehending in one vast glance the whole wide sweep of hill and valley round her—infinite as it seemed to the child's eyes; " no in the world—only it, and folk were sleeping below it. Jacky says the angels plant them—is that true? wait till I get it."

The child darted away, and returned in a moment, bringing a small, wild, blue violet, one of those little, shapeless flowers, whose minute, dark leaves have so exquisite a fragrance. Anne took it from her, smiling, and repeating: " It will return in spring," offered it to Archibald. He received it with some emotion. This sole flower in the world, as Lilie said, brought to him

from the grave of father and of mother—the only spot of earth in Strathoran where he was not a stranger. He accepted the emblem, fragrant of their memories, as it seemed, fragrant of hope and life in the dreary winter-time, and, with its promise breathing from its leaves: "It will return in spring!"

They were both silent and thoughtful: Archibald absorbed with these remembrances and anticipations, while Anne, sympathizing fully with him, was yet half inclined to blame herself for her involuntary exhilaration. The weight was lifted off Anne's heart. It was no longer a dread and horror, that secret life of Norman's, but a thing to be rejoiced in, and to draw brightest encouragement from—a very star of hope.

The sound of wheels upon the road recalled her thoughts. Mrs. Catherine's ponies had been led away by Johnnie Halflin. It was a shabby inn-gig, driven by one of the hangers-on of the 'Sutherland Arms,' in Portoran, which now drove up, and took the phaeton's place. A young man, with a pleasant, manly face, alighted, and, looking at Anne and Archibald dubiously, stood hesitating before them, and, at

last, with some embarrassment, asked for Mrs. Catherine.

Jacky darted forward to show him in, and, in a few minutes, re-appeared, breathless, with the stranger's card in her hand. Archibald had gone in—Anne had risen, and stood looking towards the little gate, waiting for Mrs. Catherine and Miss Falconer.

"Oh! if ye please, Miss Anne—" exclaimed Jacky.

"Well, Jacky, what is it?"

Jacky held up the card—"Mr. James Aytoun." "If ye please, Miss Anne, I think it'll be Miss Alice's brother."

Anne hastened forward to tell Mrs. Catherine, somewhat disturbed by the information. She feared for Lewis. Lewis was not so confident in the truth of these letters as she, and might betray his doubt to Alice Aytoun's brother, a lawyer, skilled in discerning those signs of truth in the telling of a story, which Lewis would lack in his narrative.

Jacky stole back to the library: the fire was getting low, she persuaded herself, and while she improved it, she could steal long glances at the stranger, and decide that he was "like

Miss Alice, only no half so bonnie." When the mending of the fire was complete, she slid into a corner, and began to restore various misplaced books. James watched her for a minute or two with some amusement. Alice had spoken of this dark, singular, elfin girl. She lingered so long that he forgot her. At last a voice alarmed him, close at his ear.

" If ye please—"

He looked up—Jacky was emboldened.

" If ye please—Miss Alice—"

" What about Miss Alice?" asked James, kindly.

" Just, is she quite well, Sir?" said Jacky, abashed.

" Quite well, I am much obliged to you," said James.

Jacky hovered still. Somewhat startled James Aytoun would have been, had he divined the eager question hanging upon her very lips:

" Oh, if ye please, will they no let her be married on Mr. Lewis?" but Jacky restrained her interest in Alice Aytoun's fortunes, sufficiently to say: " Mrs. Catherine is coming, Sir!" and to glide out of the room.

" James Aytoun!" exclaimed Mrs. Catherine,

as Anne interrupted the indignant declamation of Marjory Falconer, to inform her of the stranger's arrival. "Ay! that is like a man; I am pleased with that. The lad must have both sense and spirit. Send down to Merkland for Lewis without delay, Gowan, and come in with me to the library; the lad's business is with you, more than me. I like the spirit of him; there has been no milk-and-water drither, or lingering here. Come away."

They entered the house. "Marjory Falconer," said Mrs. Catherine, "go up the stair, and wait till we come to ye. Say nothing of yon to Archie; but, be ye sure, I will stand no such thing from the hands of the evil pack of them—hounds!"

Marjory obeyed; and Mrs. Catherine and Anne entered the library. The young man and the old lady exchanged looks of mutual respect. James Aytoun's prompt attention to this important matter, brought the full sunshine of Mrs. Catherine's favour upon him. She received him after her kindest fashion.

"Ye are welcome to my house, James Aytoun; and it pleases me, that I can call a lad who gives such prompt heed to the honour

of his house kinsman. Are ye wearied with your journey? or would you rather speak of the matter that brought ye here at once?"

"Certainly," said James, smiling in spite of himself, at this abrupt introduction of the subject, "I should much rather ascertain how this important matter stands, at once. Your letter surprised us very greatly, Mrs. Catherine; you will imagine that—and of course I feel it of the utmost consequence that I should lose no time in making myself acquainted with the particulars."

"Wise and right," said Mrs. Catherine, approvingly, "and spoken like a forecasting and right-minded man. Sit down upon your seat, James Aytoun, and ye shall hear the story."

James seated himself.

"Perhaps it would be well that I saw Mr. Ross?"

"I have sent for Lewis," said Mrs. Catherine. "He will be here as soon as he is needed. This is his sister, Miss Ross, of Merkland. Gowan, ye are of more present use than Lewis—ye will stay with us."

They gathered round the table in silence. James Aytoun felt nervous and embarrassed—

he did not know how to begin. Mrs. Catherine saved him from his difficulty.

"James Aytoun, it would be putting a slight upon the manly and straightforward purpose that brought ye here, if we were going about the bush in this matter, and did not speak clearly. Your father was murdered—shot by a coward hand behind him. The whole world has laid the wyte of this upon Norman Rutherford. I have believed the same myself for eighteen years. Listen to me! I am not given to change, nor am I like to alter my judgment lightly; but now I declare to you, James Aytoun, that, far more clearly than ever I held his guilt, do I believe, and am sure, that Norman Rutherford was not the man."

James was uneasy under the gaze of those large, keen eyes, and did not wish either to meet the earnest look of Anne Ross, who seemed to be watching so eagerly for his opinion.

"I shall be most happy, Mrs. Catherine," he said, "to find that you have proof—that Mr. Ross has proof—sufficient for the establishment of this. I have certainly no feelings of revenge; but the crime which deprived Alice

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and myself of a father must of necessity keep the two families apart. I could not consent to any further intercourse between Mr. Ross and my sister on any other terms than those you mention. But the evidence is fearfully strong, Mrs. Catherine. Since my mother received your letter, I have examined it again thoroughly, and so far as circumstantial evidence can go, it is most clear and overwhelming. I shall be most happy to be convinced that the world has judged erroneously; but you will excuse me for receiving it with caution; if this unhappy young man—I beg your pardon, Miss Ross—had been brought before any court in Scotland, with the evidence, he must infallibly have been found guilty."

"Gowan," said Mrs. Catherine, "ye have the letters."

Anne drew them from her breast—she had a feeling of insecurity when they were not in her own immediate possession.

"Had we not better wait till Lewis comes?"

"No," said Mrs. Catherine. "What Lewis cares for, is the winning of the bairn Alice—what you care for, first and most specially, is

the clearing of your brother's disgraced name. Norman is safest in your hands, Gowan. Read the letters."

"Mr. Aytoun," said Anne, with nervous firmness, "we have no systematic proof to lay before you. Anything which can directly meet and overcome the evidence of which you speak, remains still to be gathered—and it is possible, that this, on which we build our hopes, may seem but a very feeble foundation to you. In law, I suppose, it could have no weight for a moment: but yet to those who knew my brother Norman, and were acquainted with his peculiar temperament and nature, it carries absolute conviction. I scarcely hope that it can have the same power of convincing you—but I pray you to receive as certainly true, before I read this, the judgment which all his friends pronounced upon my unhappy brother, before this dishonour came upon him. They call him the most truthful and generous of men: they distinguish him for these two qualities above all his compeers. Mrs. Catherine, I speak truly?"

"Truthful as the course of nature itself, which the Almighty keeps from varying.

Generous as the sun that He hath set to shine upon the just and the unjust. Do not linger, Gowan: read Norman's letter."

Anne lifted the letter, and glanced up at James before she began to read—his eyes were fixed upon her, his face was full of grave anxiety—convinced or unconvinced, she was sure at least of an attentive listener. She began to read—her voice trembling at first, as the quick throbbings of her heart almost choked it, but becoming hysterically strong, as she went on; her mind, agitated as Norman's was when he wrote that letter, eager like him, by what repetitions or incoherent words soever, that were strongest and most suitable for the urgent purpose, to throw off the terrible accusation under which he lay: it was like no second party reading an old letter; it was the very voice and cry of one pleading for life—for more than life—for lost good fame and honour.

James Aytoun's eyes were steadily fixed upon her; and as she closed the letter, her whole frame vibrating, he drew a long breath—that most grateful of all sounds to the ears of a speaker who desires to move and impress his audience. Anne looked up eagerly and anxious.

He had covered his face with his hand. Neither of them spoke; until, at last, James raised his head:

"May I see that letter, Miss Ross? Can you give it me?"

Anne had omitted the sentence in which Norman mentioned his escape. She folded it in, and handed him the letter. He read it again carefully, and yet again. Besides the earnest agony of its words, there was a mute eloquence about that yellow, timeworn paper. Blisters of tears were on it: tears of terrible grief—tears of tremulous hope. Its very characters, abrupt and broken as they were, spoke as with a living voice. Nothing false—nothing feigned, could be in the desperate energy of that wild cry, the burden of Norman's self-defence: "I am innocent! I am innocent!"

"Miss Ross," said James Aytoun, "there never was man convicted from clearer evidence than that which has persuaded the world of your brother's guilt. I cannot comprehend it—my faith is shaken. I confess to you, that I feel this letter to be true—that I can no longer think of him as the murderer."

Anne tried to smile—she could not. A

stranger—a man prejudiced against Norman—the son of the dead. The tears came over her cheeks in a burst of joy. She thought it the voice of universal acquittal: she forgot all the difficulties that remained—Norman was saved.

The library-door opened, and Lewis entered. Mrs. Catherine rose, and presented him to James: the two young men shook hands with an involuntary cordiality, at which they were themselves astonished. Anne was conquering herself again: but joy seemed so much more difficult to keep in bounds, and restrain, than sorrow was. She had little experience of the first—much of the other. She started up, and laid her hand on Lewis's arm.

"Lewis, Lewis! the way is clearing before us. Mr. Aytoun gives us his support. Mr. Aytoun thinks him innocent!"

CHAPTER III.

"This Gospel:
That as He stood in stead of man, who died
On yonder Hebrew mountain, so each spirit
Of man, in all true tenderness and love,
Shall bear its brother's burden—helpfully,
As knit in common weakness, common strength.
Of this humanity, which the Lord pitied,
And loved, and took upon him—
A strange sunshine—
Upon the unformed chaos of chill souls
Shedding bewildering light."

Lewis Ross was undergoing a process of amelioration. From his earliest days he had been taught to consider himself the person of greatest importance in Merkland; and the per-

nicious belief had evolved itself in a very strong and deeply-rooted selfishness, to which the final touch and consummation had been given by his foreign travel. Thrown then, with his natural abilities, always very quick and sharp, if not of the highest order, upon the noisy current of the world, with no other occupation than to take care of himself—to attend to his own comforts —to scheme and deliberate for his own enjoyments, the self-important boy had unconsciously risen into a selfish man, having no idea that a supreme regard for his own well-being and comfort was not the most reasonable and proper centre, round which his cares and hopes could revolve.

He returned home. The home routine was going on as before. The servants, his mother, Anne, all did homage to the superior importance of Lewis. He received it as his due. These were but satellites ; he, himself, was the planet of their brief horizon. Little Alice helped the delusion on ; her simple heart yielded with so little resistance to his fascinations.

All at once the dream was rudely broken. Anne, his quiet, serviceable sister, he suddenly found to be absorbed by the concerns of this

unknown Norman, whose very name was strange to him. His own little Alice must consider the pleasure of her mother and brother before his. Lewis was suddenly stopped short in his career of complacent selfishness. The people round him were ready to risk all things for each other. Mrs. Catherine's wealth and lands were nothing to her, as she said, in comparison with the welfare of Archibald Sutherland, who had no nearer claim upon her than that of being the son of her friend. Anne's whole soul was engrossed with anxiety for the deliverance of Norman: her own self did not cost her a thought. Mr. Fergusson and Mr. Foreman were spending time and labour heartily in the service of the broken laird, who could make them no return: and worst of all, they expected that Lewis also should join in that Quixotry, as a necessary and unavoidable duty, without even thinking that by so doing he would deserve any particular praise. In the fastnesses of his self-content, Lewis was shaken.

Then came James Aytoun, the stranger, to whom this Norman, whose very name inspired Anne, was, and could be nothing, except, indeed, a detested criminal—the sup-

posed murderer of his father. He came, he saw: and lo! he was deeper into the heart of the struggle than Lewis had ever been; believing Norman's innocence—declaring his intention of joining Robert Fergusson immediately, and assisting in his investigations; consulting with Anne in frank confidence, and with a far more genuine sympathy than had ever been awakened in the colder heart of Lewis.

The young Laird of Merkland was overpowered: the contagion of James Aytoun's hearty, manly feeling, of his ready and quick belief, smote Lewis with a sense of his own unenviable singularity. The cloak of self he had been wrapped in began to loosen, and drop away; he began to realise the sad lot of his exiled brother, continually waiting for the kind search, and acquitting justice, which should bring him home again; and growing sick with deferred and fainting hope, as year after year went by, and there came no kindly token over the sea. The letter, instinct now with the breath of earnest belief, which had carried it into those other hearts, began to operate upon Lewis. He sat down between James Aytoun and Anne; he took a part in their consultations; he forgot

himself, in thinking of Norman. The divine rod had stricken the desert rock once more, and the freshness of new life—a life for others—a life for the world, dawned upon Lewis Ross.

Anne and James were already conversing like intimate friends. Lewis, with his natural frankness, was soon as deep in the subject as they. Anne's face brightened as she looked upon him. Mrs. Catherine sent him now and then a word of kindly harshness, more affectionately than was her wont. Their plans were being laid.

"And I would ask of ye, James Aytoun," said Mrs. Catherine, "for what reason that ill-faured buckie of a gig is standing at my door? and what business the cripple helper from the Portoran inn has among my servants? I must take order with this."

"The man is waiting for me," said James. "I must return home to-morrow, Mrs. Catherine—and the day is waning. I must get into Portoran soon."

"You are not blate," said Mrs. Catherine, "to think of crossing my threshold this night again. Hold your peace, young man: there is no voice lifted under this roof with authority but mine, and I will not have it. Jacky!"

Jacky made her appearance at the door—"let the man that drove Mr. Aytoun up, get his dinner and a dram, and then tell your mother he is not to wait — Mr. Aytoun does not return to-night. And now, young folk, are ye near through with your consulting? I have a visitor waiting for me up the stair."

"You decide to go with me to-morrow, Mr. Ross?" said James.

"Yes, certainly," said Lewis. "I will not do much good I dare say; but I shall, at least, be on the spot."

"Ye are done, are ye?" said Mrs. Catherine. "James Aytoun I have another matter to speak to you about. Has a stranger in the country—the purchaser of an old estate—any shadow of a right to shut up a road which has been the property of the folk of this parish of Strathoran, since beyond the memory of man?"

"No," said James, "no proprietor has—of however long standing he may be."

"Not myself say ye?" said Mrs. Catherine, "that is another thing, James Aytoun. My house has held this land for many generations. I have a right of service from the people; but an upstart—a laird by purchase, by purchase,

said I?—by cheatry and secret theftdom, nothing better! There is a creature of this kind upon the lands of Strathoran, and the way by the waterside is blocked up this day—a kirk road! a by-way as auld as the tenure of my lands!—the cattle never did a worse thing for their own peacefulness. The road shall return to the folk it rightfully belongs to, if I should have the whole reprobate pack of them before the Court of Session!"

"Who is the proprietor?" said James.

"Lord Gillravidge," answered Lewis.

"Lord Gillravidge? Hold your peace, Lewis Ross, when folk are not speaking to you, as a callant of your years should. The house of Strathoran has been a sinful house, James Aytoun, and Providence has sent upon it a plague of frogs, as was sent upon Egypt in the time of Israel's captivity—puddocks that have the gift of venom over and above the native slime of them. The proprietor is Archibald Sutherland, who is dwelling in my house at this moment; but the lad has let his possessions slip through his fingers, and the vermin are in them. I would take the law with me. What

should be my first step, James Aytoun, for the recovery of the road?"

"Throw down the barricade," said Lewis.

"Lewis Ross, I have told ye to hold your peace—though I will not say but what there are glimmerings of discernment breaking through the shell; tell Alice from me, James Aytoun, that the callant, if he were once through this season of vanity, gives promise of more judgment than I looked for at his hands. It is not my wont to wait for other folk's bidding, Lewis —the barricade is down before now; but what order is it right that I should take, if the cattle put it up again?"

"Had you not better try a remonstrance, Mrs. Catherine," said James. "It may have been done in ignorance."

"Remonstrance! a bonnie story that I should condescend to remonstrate with the hounds. Where are ye going, Gowan? Did I not bid ye remain with us?"

"You forget that Marjory is up stairs, Mrs. Catherine," said Anne.

"I forget no such thing—the bairns are daft! counselling me with their wisdom in my

own house—and that minds me that I am forgetting the comfort of the stranger like a self-seeking old wife as I am. James Aytoun, I will let you see your room—and you, bairns, remain where ye are, and dine with him. Ye are like to be near kindred—it is right ye should be friends."

Mrs. Catherine led James Aytoun away, and Anne and Lewis joined Marjory in the drawing-room, where, the fumes of her indignation scarcely over, she had been firmly shutting her lips for the last hour, lest some hint of the shut-up by-way should escape them, to pain the landless Archibald.

They spent the evening pleasantly together. James Aytoun was fresh from that peculiar society of Edinburgh, whose intellectual progress is the pulse of Scotland, healthful, strong, and bold, as its beatings have been for these past centuries. His own compeers and companions were the rising generation—lawyers, physicians, clergymen, literati, whom the course of some score years would find in the highest places there. The intellectual life and activity which breathed out from his very conversation, stimulated Lewis. These pursuits of

science and literature—those professional matters even, to the consideration of which intellect so elevated and acute was devoted, gave the country laird a new idea of the pleasure and dignity of life. Labour—healthful, vigorous, energetic, manly labour—not vacant ease or frivolous enjoyment, was the thing esteemed in that lettered community of beautiful Edinburgh, the names of whose toiling, daring, chivalrous, intellectual workmen, would be household words to the next wave of Scottish population—would have risen into the mental firmament ere then, stars for a world to see.

It was a particularly happy thing for Lewis at this especial time, his encounter with James Aytoun; the unselfish breadth of his good mind and heart, the generous start to exertion, the clear health and readiness of all his well cultured faculties, and his frank and instinctive energy, carried with them all the better part of Lewis Ross's nature. Their visitor, with his intelligent conversation, and well-cultivated mind, pleased, and made friends of them all; but conferred especial benefit and invigoration upon Lewis.

The next day they left the Tower together.

Lewis, with his old self-confidence, believing himself sure to help on the search mightily by his presence; but yet so much more earnest and unselfish in his desire to see the truth established, that Anne's heart rejoiced within her. Mrs. Ross was sulkily reconciling herself to the obvious necessity. She was by no means interested in the result of the investigation, and was inclined to hope that it would be unsuccessful, and that Lewis might be released from his engagement, yet, nevertheless, prepared herself, with much sullenness and ill-humour, for "the worst."

Anne accompanied Lewis, in the morning, to the Tower, to bid James good-by, and charge him with various kindly messages, and some little tokens of sisterly good-will for Alice. At Mrs. Catherine's desire she remained. Mrs. Catherine had already despatched Andrew with the following missive to Strathoran:

"Mrs. Catherine Douglas, of the Tower, desires that Lord Gillravidge will explain to her, at his earliest leisure, his motive for shutting up the by-way upon Oranside—a thing both unreasonable and unlawful, and

which she has no thought of submitting to for a day. The path belongs to the people of the parish, who had dwelt upon the land for centuries, before ever it passed into Lord Gillravidge's tenantcy. Mrs. Catherine Douglas desires Lord Gillravidge to know that he has done what is contrary to the law of the land, and expects to have an immediate reason rendered to her, for the insult and hardship inflicted upon her people and parish, by the closing of a known kirk road, and public way."

Mrs. Catherine and her household were busied in preparation for Archibald's departure. Mrs. Catherine herself was hemming with a very fine needle, and almost invisible thread, breadths of transparent cambric, for the shirts which her three generations of domestics, Mrs. Elspat Henderson, Mrs. Euphan Morison, and Jacky, were occupied in making.

"And Gowan," said Mrs. Catherine, "I like not idle greives. If ye are not pleased with Jacky's stitching, take the other breast yourself—there is plenty to hold ye all busy. I have no broo of young folk, sitting with

their hands before them. What did you get clear eyesight and quick fingers for?"

Anne took the work—into no unknown or "'prentice hand," would it have been confided. Mrs. Catherine's "whiteseam" was elaborated into a positive work of art. Within her strong spirit, and covered by her harsh speech, there lay so much of that singular delicacy, which could endure nothing coarse or unsuitable, that the smallest household matters came within its operation. Mrs. Catherine had little faith in the existence of fine taste or delicate perceptions, in conjunction with a coarse or disorderly "seam." Would modern young ladies think her judgment correct?

"Archie is in Portoran," said Mrs. Catherine, after a little time had elapsed, during which the fine work and cheerful conversation proceeded in brisk and pleasant unison. "There are still some matters to be settled with Mr. Foreman, and he expects the letter the day that will fix his going to Glasgow. We are nothing less than a bundle of contradictions, Gowan, we unsatisfied human folk. It was my own special desire and wish that the lad should verily plunge himself into some labour for the

redemption of his land; now I have a drither at letting him go away to a mere, hard money-getting work, where little of either heart or head is needed."

"Little heart, perhaps," said Anne; "but, at least, the head must be very necessary, Mrs. Catherine."

"It's you that does not ken," answered Mrs. Catherine. "Head! I tell ye, Gowan, I have seen divers in my youth who had gathered great fortunes by trade, and yet were vapouring, empty-headed, purse-proud fuils; beginning by running errands, and sweeping shops, and the like, and ending by making bairnly fuils of themselves, to the laughter of the vain and thoughtless, and to the shame of right-minded folk. We have other imaginations of merchant-men, Gowan; we give them a state and circum-stance that the men are as innocent of as that callant Johnnie Halflin outby there. We think of the old days when merchants were princes, and of them that stood afar off, and wailed for Babylon. There are some such, doubtless, now, but it is not aye the best that are the most for-tunate. And to think of Archie living for years among folk to whom the paltry siller is the sole

god and good in this world or the next. Maybe, Gowan—maybe in the rebound of his carelessness, getting to like the yellow dirt himself for its own sake!"

"No fear," said Anne. "Archibald is able to stand the probation in every way, I trust, Mrs. Catherine; and it is but a means—it is not an end."

"Ay," said Mrs. Catherine. "The callant has a great stake. He is a changed man, Gowan, so far as we may form a judgment. Wherefore should I ever have doubted it? As if true prayers could lie unanswered before the Throne for ever!"

Jacky opened the door.

"If ye please —"

"What, ye elf? Can ye no speak out?"

"It's—it's the man—the stranger"—Jacky remembered her former description of him, but scorned to repeat herself; "that came to the Tower with Mr. Foreman. If ye please, will I bring him in?"

"The jackal—the fuil that does Lord Gillravidge's errands," said Mrs. Catherine. "I am lothe that the cloots of an unclean animal should come within this room, but what can I do,

Gowan? The library is Archie's especial room, and if he comes in, I would like ill that he saw any of this evil crew."

"He had better come here," said Anne.

Mrs. Catherine made a motion of disgust.

"Hear ye, ye imp! Is he his lane?"

"There's a gentleman with him," said Jacky. "No a grown-up man—just young like—but he's a gentleman."

"Bring them up here."

Jacky disappeared, and, in a moment after, ushered Mr. Fitzherbert, and the good-humoured, foolish, fair-haired lad, who had been with him when little Alice Aytoun was intercepted on the way, into the room. Mrs. Catherine's note had been the subject of considerable mirth at Strathoran. The Honourable Giles Sympelton, in particular, had been exceedingly amused at the idea of the old lady "showing fight," and had proposed and urged, something against Fitzherbert's will, this present expedition. Mr. Fitzherbert was elaborately polite and high-bred. The young man was in high spirits, overflowing with suppressed laughter, and anticipating capital fun.

Mrs. Catherine rose, drew up her stately

figure, and remained standing. Mr. Fitzherbert bowed with agreeable condescension. The Honourable Giles was startled out of his laughter. That strong, vigorous, stately old lady was not a person to be trifled with.

"Lord Gillravidge, Madam," began Mr. Fitzherbert, "received your communication, and would have been most happy to have made your acquaintance personally, had it not been for the misfortune of a previous engagement. He has requested me to represent him — quite unworthy, certainly—but, having the honour to be acquainted with his sentiments, shall be glad to give any explanation that you desire."

"I require no explanation from Lord Gillravidge," said Mrs. Catherine, "except of his purpose concerning this unlawful deed he has done. Will he give it up of his own will, or will he be forced to do it? That is all I desire to know of Lord Gillravidge."

Mr. Fitzherbert seated himself unbidden.

"Beg you will permit me to make a brief explanation. Lord Gillravidge has the tenderest regard for feelings—indulgent even to a little natural prejudice—means everthing to be done in the most friendly manner. I assure you,

Madam, I can explain everything with the greatest ease."

The Honourable Giles was still standing. The lad began to have some perception that this was not a place for boyish mirth or derision. Anne silently invited him to be seated.

Mrs. Catherine grew still more stately and erect. She would not condescend to be angry.

"I desire no explanations at Lord Gillravidge's hands. Will he throw the by-way open, or will he not?"

Mr. Fitzherbert smiled insinuatingly.

"Your kind indulgence, Madam—but for a moment. I shall take care not to exhaust your patience, knowing that ladies are not distinguished for patience—a good quality though—I beg your pardon, Madam. I am sorry to see I keep you standing."

"Be not troubled, Sir," said Mrs. Catherine, with bitter contempt; "but make yourself sure that a whole tribe like ye would keep me in no position that did not please myself."

"Sorry to have the misfortune of displeasing you, Madam," said the imperturbable Fitzherbert. "Had not the least intention of offence,

I assure you—return to the subject. Lord Gillravidge, Madam, is actuated by the best feelings—the utmost desire to be on friendly terms. He only needs to be known to be appreciated. An excellent neighbour, a warm friend—altogether, a remarkable person, is my friend, Lord Gillravidge."

"Fitz, Fitz!" whispered his young companion, reprovingly.

Mrs. Catherine turned round, and looked at the lad with grave concern, and some interest.

"His Lordship is willing to be perfectly tolerant," continued Mr. Fitzherbert; "to give way to prejudices, and make allowance for angry feelings—and of course he expects to be as well used in return. 'Do unto others,'—it is natural that he should look for the same in return."

Mrs. Catherine waved her hand.

"A lady of refined tastes, such as I have the honour of addressing, must perfectly understand the peculiar feelings and excessive delicacy and retirement of my accomplished friend. Feels himself quite wounded by vulgar intrusion—shrinks, above all things, from public

notice—extremely susceptible by nature, and of the most delicate constitution."

Mrs. Catherine stamped her foot impatiently.

"Is it the Comus of yon crew of transformed cattle that the man ventures to profane such words upon?"

"Sorry to be so misapprehended," said Mr. Fitzherbert, with an assumption of dignity. "Mere false reports, and vulgar misunderstanding of elegant leisure, and refined amusements —perfectly unfounded, I assure you, Madam. Lord Gillravidge should be judged by his peers, not by a set of barbarous rustics."

"Be silent, Sir," said Mrs. Catherine. "I wot well the people of this parish should be judged by *their* peers, and that is another race than yours. Beware how you lay ill names, in my presence, upon the natives of this soil!"

"Beg pardon, Madam, I am unfortunate in my subjects—had no idea you were specially interested in illiterate peasants. I beg you yourself will do his Lordship the honour of considering his position. I know him so intimately, that I can speak with confidence of

his excessive delicacy and nervous refinement of constitution — quite remarkable, I assure you."

"And what is all this to me?" exclaimed Mrs. Catherine. "Think ye I care the value of a straw for the nerves of your lordling? Will he persist in this folly, or will he not? His constitution may be either iron or glass, besides, for any concern I have in the matter."

"Your patience, Madam," said the smiling Fitzherbert, "I mention these characteristics in explanation. My lord is a stranger, not acquainted with the superior character of the natives of this soil. A most distinguished peasantry, moral and intelligent—but vulgar nevertheless, and intruding on his privacy. There is some natural hauteur perhaps—what might be expected from an English nobleman of high family, accustomed to all the privileges of exalted rank, and shrinking from undue familiarity. He really cannot bear intrusion, and therefore shut up the by-way—positively compelled by his delicate feelings—trains of rustics passing through his private grounds! His Lordship could not permit it."

Mrs. Catherine could bear this no longer—

she was walking through the room in towering wrath and indignation.

"An English nobleman! an English cheat and sharper! enjoying his ill-gotten gains under a roof, that I marvel does not fall upon the reprobate cattle he has gathered below it. Vulgar intrusion! the passing-by of honourable men and women, that would not change the honest name of their puirtith, for the disgrace of his wealth and his sin. *His* private grounds! and wha, if it were not the master-spirit of all iniquity, procured that the fair lands of Strathoran should ever bruik him as their lord? Ye, your very self, pitiful animal as ye are, the hired servant of this prosperous iniquity, doing its evil bidding, are scarce so abhorrent to decent folk as the master of ye; the malignant tempting spirit, that led an innocent youth into the mire of sin and folly, that he might rob him of his inheritance; and now, can venture here, in the very face of me, who ken his villanies, to set up for a man of delicate frame and tender mind, shrinking from the lawful passers-by of a peaceable parish; folk of lineage and blood, if that were all, an hundredfold better than himself!"

Vehemently, and inspired with indignation, Mrs. Catherine spoke, the floor thrilling beneath her hasty steps.

"Fitz," whispered the astonished lad, "the old lady has the best of it—she's right."

Fitzherbert assumed an air of offended innocence. "Really, Madam, after this language—I am amazed—astonished!"—

"And wha, think ye, in this house or country is concerned, that you should be astonished or amazed?" interrupted Mrs. Catherine; "or what are ye, that I should hold parley with your like, and profane the air of my dwelling with your master's unclean name? Answer me my demand with as much truthfulness as is in ye, and begone from my house. I will have the breath of no such vermin near me."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the astounded Fitzherbert, "this is perfectly unparalleled; if a gentleman were using such language to me—"

"Ye would fight him," said Mrs. Catherine, disdainfully. "Ay! presuming that he was inclined so to demean himself, and was not content with laying his whip about your shoulders, as Marjory Falconer did."

Fitzherbert started up, enraged. "I can hold no communication with a person who delights in insulting me. You shall rue this, Madam, you shall rue this!"

"Fitz," said the Honourable Giles, interposing as he passed to the door, "Gillravidge will be angry; you have not arranged this."

"And with your permission," added Mrs. Catherine, "I say ye do not leave this house till my question is answered."

Poor Fitzherbert could not afford to incur the anger of Lord Gillravidge. He was compelled to content himself with many humiliations, and this among the rest.

"Madam! in consideration of my friend's business, I overlook these personalities. Lord Gillravidge is, as I have said, a man of ancient family, and high breeding, belonging to a most exclusive aristocratic circle, and will not have his privacy broken. His Lordship hoped to be understood—the peculiar feeling of high birth, and necessity for retirement—and must continue to trust that a lady, herself of some station, will offer no opposition."

"Ancient family!" exclaimed Mrs. Catherine. "Does your English lordling, whose name no

man ever heard tell of, till he came to take possession of his prey, daur to say that to me, who can trace my lineage, without break or blot, back to the dark gray man! Tell the reprobate master of ye, that my house was set down upon this land, before ever the rank soil and unwholesome heat of cities had brought forth the first ancestor of your evil brood. Tell him, that this people is my people, and that his good blood is a mean falset, if he does not honour the honourable folk native to a free land. Further, I will spare neither time nor siller to recover them their right; either he will throw open the road this very day, or he will suffer the immediate judgment of the law —I leave him his choice; and now, the need for bearing the sight of ye is over, carry my message, and depart from my house."

Fitzherbert did not linger. Young Sympelton rose to follow him.

"Callant," said Mrs. Catherine, "ye are young to be in such ill hands. Tarry a moment, I would speak further to ye."

The lad hesitated. Fitzherbert was already descending the stair.

"Sit down," said Mrs. Catherine. "I have something to say to you."

The lad obeyed.

"Have ye been long in the keeping of these vile cattle? I am meaning, have ye been long in the unwholesome neighbourhood of that man?"

The Honourable Giles laughed; tried to be very frank, and at his ease, and answered that he had been a month at Strathoran.

"Dwelling night and day under the shadow of uncleanness and all iniquity. Callant, to whom do ye belong? Has nobody charge of ye?"

To which the Honourable Giles responded, somewhat offended, that he was quite able to take care of himself.

"Are ye?" said Mrs. Catherine; "ye are the first of your years that I ever kent. Have you father or mother living?"

"My father is: he's in France," said young Sympelton: "my mother is dead."

"Ay, it is even as I thought. Poor motherless callant, trusted in such company. Is your father in his senses, that he perils ye thus?"

"In his senses! what do you mean?" exclaimed the Honourable Giles.

"I will tell ye, what I mean. Ye have a youthful face, that looks as if it did not ken vice yet, for its own hand. If I tell ye there is a deadly plague in that house, will ye believe me, and flee from it?"

The youth looked at her in amazement.

"I tell ye, callant, there is a mortal malady in that house of Strathoran; a sickness that will kill more than your life; that will strip ye of good fame and honour, or ever ye have entered the world; and make ye a bankrupt, ruined, disgraced man, when ye should be but a fresh, youthful, ingenuous callant. Mind what I am saying; there are serpents yonder, deadlier than the snakes of India. Do not sleep under that roof another night. Go home to your father, and tell him henceforward to keep an eye on your wanderings himself, and no trust you, a precious laddie, as ye no doubt are to him, to the warning of a stranger."

The young man laughed; he did not know how to understand this, though the kindness of the strange, stern old lady, moved as much as it astonished him.

"Oh! that's because you've quarrelled with Gillravidge."

"I quarrel with no vermin," said Mrs. Catherine. "If I cannot cast the plague out of a land, I warn the healthful and innocent from the borders of it. Callant, I know not so much as your name; but six or seven years ago, a young man very dear to me, was as you are, blythe, happy, full of promise, well-endowed, and honoured. The reptile brood ye are among got their meshes over him—corrupted his young mind, broke his blythe spirit, devoured his substance, defrauded him of his land, and then left him—a sinful, broken man, to struggle with his bitter repentance and misery as he best could. Beware, young man—beware of your youth—beware of the gladness that must depart for evermore, if ye once taste of that cup of vice. Ye have a terrible stake in it; for the sake of all that ye have, or can gain in this world and the next, come out of that sinful house. I will give ye the shelter of mine if ye desire it. I cannot see a callant like what ye are, or seem, lost to all honest uses, and no put forth my hand."

Young Sympelton rose—he lingered—hesi-

tated—there was dew under his eyelids ; he was ashamed that any one could have moved him so—*him*, a man !

Fitzherbert thrust in his head at the door—laughed derisively.

" Ah, a young penitent—very interesting—old lady preaching at him."

The youth dashed out and ran down the stair.

They saw him immediately after, arm-in-arm with the tempter, returning to Strathoran.

" Gowan," said Mrs. Catherine, " the look of that callant's face has made my heart sore. I have warned him—I can help him in no other way. The Lord requite the reprobate race that are leading young spirits to destruction."

CHAPTER IV.

"Who seeks with painful toil shall honour soonest fynd."

"In woods, in waves, in warres she wonts to dwell,
And will be found with peril and with pain,
Ne can the man, that moulds in ydle cell,
Unto her happy mansion attain,
Before her gate High God did sweate ordain,
And wakeful watches ever to abide."

FAERY QUEEN.

Mr. George Lumsden, the manager of Messrs. Sutor and Sinclair's Glasgow house, was desirous that Mr. Sutherland should enter immediately on his probation. So said the letter which Mr. Foreman read to Archibald, while Mrs. Catherine was receiving at the

Tower the emissaries from Strathoran. The good lawyer was in high spirits at the successful issue of his negotiations. Archibald was satisfied that his work was now so near a beginning. Mr. Fergusson acquiesced with a sigh. There were no further obstacles in the way. Next morning, it was arranged, Archibald should leave Portoran.

He rode home to the Tower in a slight excitement of mingled regret and hopefulness. He was sadly wanting in that placid equanimity whose calm is not disturbed by change. He felt these variations of the firmament of his fortune, as the sea feels the wind, answering no less swiftly to the curl of the lightest breeze, than to the sweep of the gale which chronicles its progress in stories of shipwreck and death. He felt it a very momentous thing, this second beginning of his course. Formerly, he had left his native district with every adventitious help—favoured of fortune, rich in friends—yet had returned a ruined, solitary man. Now he went forth with every favouring circumstance withdrawn—his own strength and the help of Providence—no other

aid to trust to—how, or in what sort, should he make his second return?

Mrs. Catherine's preparations were not quite completed: one half of the abundant outfit which she was preparing for her adventurer, would need to be sent after him to Glasgow. By earliest daybreak the next morning, Mrs. Euphan Morison herself began to make ready the heap of delicate and snowy linen, the making of which had occupied their time of late. At eleven Archibald was to set out.

He had time that morning to visit Merkland, to take leave of Mrs. Ross, and with much silent sorrow, and an indefinite understanding which expressed itself in no words, to bid farewell to Anne. Both of them were immersed in other cares and occupations. A solitary and long warfare lay before Archibald. Concerning matters private to themselves, both were heroically silent. They parted, each knowing the strong, honourable, true heart, that was within the other—each aware of the other's entire and full sympathy—in grave faith, fortitude, patience; and with a silent regret, that spoke more powerfully than words.

Mrs. Catherine was in the little room; she had spent most of the morning there. She had provided Archibald with all temporal necessities—she was pleading now, before God, for that other, and yet more needful spiritual providing, which should keep him blameless, in the warfare of an evil world. No vain repetitions were there in that speechless agony of supplication: the strong spirit, with its mighty grasp of faith, was wrestling for a blessing—for prosperity and success, if it should please the Giver of all Good; but, above all earthly success and prosperity, for purity and deliverance from sin. Half an hour before the time of his departure, the young man joined her.

"Archie," said Mrs. Catherine, "I desired to say my last words to ye here: ye mind your return to my house—ye mind your covenant with me, before God, and within the shadow of Sholto Douglas, my one brother, whom, if it had not been otherwise ordained, ye might have drawn your name and blood from—Archie Sutherland, ye mind your covenant?"

"I do."

"In whatever circumstances the Lord may place ye—in peril, in toil, in striving with the world—

harder than that, in ease, and peace, and prosperity, if it be His will to give ye these: with a single eye, and an honest heart, and in the strength of Him that saved ye, ye will resist sin. Archie Sutherland, ye hold by your covenant? ye plight me your word again?"

"Most earnestly—most truthfully. You trust me, Mrs. Catherine?"

"I trust ye, Archie. The Lord uphold and strengthen ye in your goings-out, and in your comings-in!" There was a pause. "And have ye gotten everything right, Archie? are ye sure there is nothing wanting that ye will need, or that I can get for ye?"

"Nothing," said Archibald. "You are only too lavish in your kindness, Mrs. Catherine; you forget that I am but a poor adventurer now."

"Whisht, callant," said Mrs. Catherine. "Kindness is no a word to be between your mother's son and me. Ay, Archie, ye are an adventurer; mind it is no common errand ye are going forth upon. To the like of you, hope is the natural breath and common air—the hopes of eild are solemn ventures, our last and weightiest—when they fail, there is no

new upspringing in the pithless soil that many hopes have withered and died upon, like September leaves. Archie, the last great hope of an aged woman is embarked in your labour. See—look where my first sun set—the darkness of its sinking is not out of my heart yet. Ye might have been of my own blood, callant; ye might have borne the name of Sholto Douglas! Now the last of them all is on your head. Archie Sutherland, be mindful of it; let me see you honourably home in your own land, before I go to another country."

Archibald answered her almost incoherently: "If it was within the power of man—if any toil could accomplish it—"

The phaeton was at the door; Andrew and Johnnie Halflin were placing the traveller's trunks upon it, while Mrs. Euphan Morison, portly and broad, stood in the doorway superintending. The hour drew very near.

"And there is yet another thing," said Mrs. Catherine. "Archie, it happens whiles that prosperity is not in the power of man—if toil cannot accomplish it—if the blessing that maketh rich, comes not upon your labour, I charge you to spend no time in vain repinings,

nor to be cast down beyond measure: mind at all times that my house is open to you—that if ye have no other shelter in the wide world, under this roof there constantly remains for ye a home. I say, mind this, Archie, as the last charge I lay upon ye. If ye are like to be overcome in your striving, come home; if your heart grows faint within ye, and ye find only weariness in your plans of merchandize instead of fortune, come home—ye can come at no time when ye will not be dearly welcome. Mind, Archie Sutherland, I say to ye, mind! that let the world smile upon ye or frown upon ye as it lists, ye have a home to come to—a household blythe to welcome ye!"

The time had come at last. The hope of return in his heart bowed down under the heaviness of his farewell, Archibald seated himself in the vehicle, and seizing the reins, drove hastily away, not trusting himself to look back again. When he had reached the high road he paused once more, to answer the mute farewell waved to him from within the enclosure of Merkland, and then turned resolutely away—away from genial home, warm friends, affection, sympathy, to cold toil and friend-

less labour, an uncongenial atmosphere, a strange country. His heart swelled within him—his breast tightened—his eyes overflowed. Years must pass, with all their unknown vicissitudes, before he looked again upon those familiar faces—before he saw his own country again lie beautiful and calm beneath the sun. He quickened his pace, keeping time with the rapid current of his thoughts. For home—for friends—for country—all his labour, all his endurance, would be for these: was it for him to repine, or murmur, with his work and his reward before him? The remembrance stirred his spirit like a trumpet, and the home voice of the Oran stole in upon his thoughts chiming so hopefully and brave:

> "Speed thy labour o'er land and sea,
> Home and kindred are waiting for thee!"

The remainder of the month passed quietly away; the little world of Strathoran was unusually still. Jeanie and Ada Mina Coulter began to weary for the marriage, which rumour said would shortly bring a very youthful, blue-eyed bride to Merkland, and for the festivities

and party-givings consequent thereupon. Miss Falconer was unusually quiet. Walter Foreman, John Coulter and their set, had scarcely any new feats or new speeches of Marjory's to make mirthful comments on. She was becoming intimate with a sober, stout, cheerful, elderly lady, who wore one unvarying dress of black silk, and was Mr. Lumsden's (of Portoran) unmarried elder sister. Miss Lumsden had taken a decided liking for the strange, wild, eccentric girl, whose exploits kept all the parish amused; and had resided one whole fortnight in the immediate vicinity of the Falcon's Craig stables and kennel, in order to assist and counsel her young friend in the onerous duties of housekeeping. To Miss Lumsden's honour be it spoken, she returned to the orderly and quiet Manse, more stanchly Miss Falconer's friend than ever, and that in spite of the very decided hand with which Marjory held the reins of government at Falcon's Craig, barely admitting counsel, and by no means tolerating assistance.

Mr. Foreman, to the great amazement of Lord Gillravidge and his friends, had served upon them sundry mystic papers, interdicting

them from their obstruction of the by-way. Lord Gillravidge resisted, and the case was to be tried before the Court of Session.

Mrs. Catherine's stately quietude was broken by the successive charges of this legal war; the old lady entered into it keenly, anathematizing with no lack of vehemence the "hounds" who were usurping the possession of the dignified house of Strathoran. The more than ordinary stillness of the district brought out the excesses of Lord Gillravidge's household in prominent and bold relief. The country people told sad tales of these—exaggerated no doubt by their own simple habits, and by their thorough dislike to the new-comer; but still possessing some foundation of truth.

Lewis Ross, with James Aytoun and Robert Fergusson, were hard at work in the fair parish on the south bank of "*the* Firth," where stood the desolate mansion of Redheugh, and where Arthur Aytoun met his fate. Lewis and James were resident in the village inn, Robert had his quarters in a comfortable farm-house at some distance from them. They were pursuing their inquiry with all diligence. In Lewis's letters to Anne, were recorded the long

walks they took, the long conversations in peasant houses, to which they were compelled to submit, in return for the scraps of information gathered, the immense quantity of country gossip, with which the history was interlarded, and the very slow progress they made in their search. Many of the elder cottagers of the district, remembered "young Redheugh" well, and spoke of his character, Lewis said, as Esther Fleming and Mrs. Catherine had done; but, though there was much affectionate respect for his youthful goodness, and much pity for his terrible fate, there was no doubt of his guilt among them, and they concluded their history of him, with an "Eh, Sirs! but mortal flesh is weak when it's left to itsel; to think o' sae mony guid gifts coming to sic an end!" Lewis did not know well what to do; he could see no hope.

Early in February they returned to Edinburgh, from whence came the following letter to his anxious sister:

"My dear Anne,

"We have at last abandoned the search in despair—there is nothing to be made of it—

I thought so before we began. We have awakened the attention of the district, and will, I fear, have to pay the penalty in some newspaper paragraphs resuscitating the whole story, which is disagreeable enough certainly—otherwise we have done nothing.

"I told you that we had, the other day, called at the cottage of the man, who was the first to discover Mr. Aytoun after the murder. This man was an important witness. He had been employed about Redheugh, and was a spectator of the quarrel between Aytoun and Norman. It had reference to a young lady, between whom and Norman there was a rumoured engagement; whether Aytoun knew this, or not, I cannot tell, but he spoke disparagingly of the girl, who was of inferior rank. Norman resented the slighting words with the utmost vehemence and passion; so much so, that the man feared some immediate collision between them. This was prevented, however, by some chance interposition, which he does not very clearly recollect. Norman was called away, and Mr. Aytoun returned home.

"It was his daily custom to walk in this

wood, though one would fancy from the character they give him, that he was by no means of a contemplative kind. He seems rather to have been one of those cool men, who take prudent means to recover themselves from the dissipation of one night, in order that they may be fit for the dissipation of the next. So it was his habit to walk in this wood early in the morning, and Norman knew it. Our informant was something of an artist, Anne. You should have heard his homely description of the stillness and beauty of the wood, as he went through it, returning from his morning's work, to breakfast; 'the sun was shining as clear as if there was naething below that dauredna be seen, or needit to shrink from the sight of man; and the innocent water running blythe beneath the trees, and the sky spreading calm aboon a', as if violence had never been dune in sicht of its blue e'e;' heightening the serenity of his background by all those delicate touches, that the terrible discovery he was about to make might stand out in bolder relief. You will say I treat this with indifference, Anne, but indeed, you are mistaken. I know Norman

better, and am more interested in his fate now, (not to speak of my own individual interest in the result) than when I left Merkland.'

"To resume the story. Our informant going carelessly forward through the wood, came suddenly upon the body of the murdered man, which had fallen, breaking down the low bushes and brushwood upon the waterside. I need not tell you his horror, nor how he describes it. He procured assistance immediately, and conveyed the body home, and afterwards returned to ascertain whether there were any traces visible of the murderer. He says, he never doubted for a moment—the last night's quarrel and estrangement, the cold sneers of Aytoun, and Norman's passionate vehemence, left him, as he thought, no room for doubt. His strong suspicion became absolute certainty, when on returning, he found, lying below some thick underwood, a light fowling-piece, bearing Norman's initials and arms. His story differs in no point from the evidence given by him at the time, and there mingles with it a compassion and regret for Norman, which make its truthfulness still more apparent. When I ventured to suggest, that in spite of all these con-

demnatory circumstances, the criminal might still be another person, he shook his head. 'I wad gie twa and a plack, Sir, to ony man that could prove that to me; na, bluid winna hide. If ony man living had spilt it, it wad have been brought hame to him before now.' To such a statement one could make no answer. I confess, I left him utterly hopeless; what can we do further?

"The other man, who met Norman upon that fatal morning, leaving the wood, is dead; but his widow lives, and remembers her husband's story perfectly. Norman, the widow says, was smiling and cheerful, humming a tune, and apparently in high spirits, and stopped on his way to greet her husband kindly, as was his wont; for she, too, testifies to the uniform goodness and gentleness of "young Redheugh." It was a mystery to her husband, she says, to the last day of his life, how a man, newly come from such a deed, with the blood of a fellow creature and a friend warm on his hand, should have smiles on his face, and kindness on his tongue, to an indifferent passer-by.

"I cannot understand it either, Anne. It is the one thing, above all others, which staggers

me. A calculating, cool, reasoning man, who even, at such a time, could think of the chances of a favourable evidence, might have been supposed capable of this—even then, I fancy there is hardly anything of the kind on record. But an impulsive, generous, sensitive man, such as universal testimony concurs in representing Norman—one cannot comprehend it. If the gaiety had been forced, the man must have observed it—it would have been an additional evidence of his guilt—but it was not so. The favourite tune—the elastic, joyous manner—the frank greeting! I cannot reconcile these with the idea of his guilt. If it had not been for this one very indistinct and impalpable piece of evidence, which, like his own letter, may influence the mind, but can have no legal force as proof, I should at once have given up the search, and taken refuge in the certainty of his guilt.

"All inquiries as to any other suspected party have proved entirely fruitless. Every circumstance had pointed so clearly to Norman, that, as I think, anything inculpating another, must have faded from the memories of the people as quite unimportant.

"James Aytoun looks very grave: he does not say much, and I cannot guess his opinion. He has been very zealous and active in the search, and has conducted it, as it seems to me, with great prudence and wisdom. I think he is very much disappointed. I even think that he still retains a lingering conviction of Norman's innocence, and is, like myself, bewildered and uncertain what step to take, or what to do.

"From Mrs. Aytoun I have received just such a reception as you might have expected from the mother of James and Alice. Tremulously kind, almost tender to me for her daughter's sake, yet often lost in long reveries of silent sorrow. No doubt this search, recalling all the circumstances of her widowhood to Mrs. Aytoun's mind, has cost her much pain. I think, however, that, to speak modestly, they don't altogether dislike me. So far as worldly matters go, we, you know, hold our heads higher than they do, and I cannot help hoping that people so sensible and friendly as James Aytoun and his mother, will not, in the spirit of a darker age, allow this old and forgotten crime to hinder the happiness of their gentle Alice. I have improved my time sufficiently, I trust, to ensure

that that same happiness is not very safe, if I am denied a share in it. I intend, to-morrow, to have an explanation with them, and ascertain definitely what are our future prospects. I need not say how gentle, and sympathizing, and affectionate—how entirely like herself, in short, our little Alice is.

"I have not much fear of the *éclaircissement* to-morrow. They will, very likely, impose some probation upon us. We are both young enough to tolerate that—but that they can steadily refuse their consent to a connection (as I flatter myself) so proper and suitable, an advantageous settlement for Alice, which will secure alike her happiness and her external comfort, I cannot believe. I shall, likely, return some time this week. Let Duncan meet me in Portoran on Friday. If I do not come, it does not matter much—the old man will be the better for the drive.

"Lewis Ross."

Beside the letter of Lewis was another, the handwriting of which Anne did not know. She had few correspondents, and opened it wonderingly. It was from James Aytoun.

"My dear Miss Ross,

"Your brother will have informed you of our failure. So far as I can at present see, we have used every possible means, and the only result is, a strengthening of the former evidence, and a more clear establishment of Mr. Rutherford's apparent guilt. For my sister's sake I began this, deeply anxious for a favourable issue. I feel only more anxious now, when I know, and have a personal interest in the nearest relatives of this unhappy young man, whom men call my father's murderer. I cannot comprehend it. In this very clear and satisfactory evidence, I am entirely bewildered and confused. Everything I have gathered in my search has confirmed and strengthened the circumstances against him; and yet, by some strange perversity, everything I have heard has increased my conviction of his innocence.

"I write thus to you, because I feel that you are even more deeply interested in this than your brother. With my friend Lewis it is a secondary matter, and I am rather pleased that it should be. So that we are sufficiently satisfied not to withhold our consent to his engagement with Alice, he has no very engrossing interest in the

matter; but with you—if I am wrong you will pardon me—it seems more deeply momentous and important. I also feel very greatly interested in it. If it were but in a professional point of view, it would claim my utmost attention.

"The evidence is very clear and full. Were it brought before any jury, there could not be the slightest doubt of the result. But, with all the tales of generosity and kindness which yet make your brother's memory fragrant in the district, and with his own very moving self-defence still further to counteract it, I have no hesitation in saying to you that this mass of evidence makes no impression upon my mind, but the very uneasy and painful one of doubt and apprehension. There is no certainty in it. All these things might have remained as they are, and yet your brother's innocence be triumphantly vindicated—if, indeed, it had not been for that last fatal step of his flight. Is he now, truly, beyond the reach of either acquittal or condemnation?—does there remain only his *name* to vindicate?

"In the meantime there cannot be any

nearer connexion between our family and yours. I regret it deeply—but it is impossible to forget that the murdered man is my father, and that while so much as a doubt remains, we must not dishonour the memory of the dead. You will understand and feel for us, I am sure. For my mother, especially, I must beg your sympathy: this matter has most painfully revived the bitterest time of her life; and while, like myself, her feelings—both for Alice's sake, and his own—are all enlisted in favour of your brother, she feels, with me, that until we have some more satisfactory proof, nearer connexion is impossible.

"You will forgive me, if I speak harshly. I feel that you will understand the necessity more calmly than I should wish Lewis to do; and I am confident that we can trust in your kind co-operation. In the meantime, I shall keep my eye on the district, and let no opportunity of throwing light upon this dark matter pass me. May I also beg your confidence? If there is any further particular of importance, trust me with it. So far as my ability goes, I shall leave no stone unturned; and will, I assure you, be-

tray no confidence with which you may honour me.

"Believe me, my dear Miss Ross,
"Very sincerely yours,
"James Aytoun."

Anne was uneasy and perplexed: this sensible, generous, thoughtful James Aytoun, suspected her secret, and claimed to be trusted with it. Could she withhold it from him? And then, this fallen edifice of hope, with all the sickness of its indefinite deferring—what could be done, indeed? It seemed foolish—it seemed mere madness, the burning desire that rose within her, to hurry to the place herself, and see if the eager eyes of anxiety and sisterly yearning could discover nothing. Alas! were not James Aytoun's eyes eager also? was not his mind trained and practised? It did not matter—Anne felt it impossible to stand still—to wait—until she had convinced herself that there was nothing more to learn. Esther Fleming's eager repetition: "I lookit to you, Miss Anne, I aye lookit to you," came back upon her, like a call from her father's very grave. She wrote hastily

to Lewis, begging him to return immediately; and then sat down to consider her plan. It might be foolish—it might be Quixotic. Possibly she could do no good—but she must try.

CHAPTER V.

"Impatience waiteth on true sorrow."
KING HENRY VI.

Upon the Friday Lewis returned home. Anne had walked out upon the Portoran road, looking for him, and met him a short distance from the gate of Merkland. He looked sulky and out of humour, and leaping from the gig, threw the reins to Duncan, and joined his sister.

"Well?" said Anne, when their first greeting was over, and Duncan out of hearing.

"Well," said Lewis, "we are just where we were. I expected nothing better. We have not advanced a step."

"I understand that," said Anne; "but what

of the Aytouns?—what understanding have you come to?—what arrangement about Alice?"

"Nothing—nothing," said Lewis, hastily; "I tell you we are exactly where we were. My position is not in the least degree better than it was on the first day I knew this history—it is worse indeed, for you buoyed me up with hopes then of the great things we should discover—see what it has all come to."

"You have surely made some arrangement—come to some understanding?" said Anne; "it is a quite useless thing to tantalize me, Lewis. Your engagement has not terminated—you have not given up—"

"Given up!" Lewis turned round indignantly. "I suppose you would like nothing better, my mother and you; but you're mistaken, I tell you. All the mothers and sisters in the kingdom should not make me give up Alice—a pretty thing!"

"You are quite unreasonable, Lewis," said Anne; "I do not want you to give up Alice—very far from that—I think you have been fortunate in winning so fresh and guileless a youthful spirit; but this impatience and petulance makes you unworthy of Alice Aytoun.

At your years men should regard their own dignity more—you are not a boy now, Lewis."

"*I* should think not," was the angry response. It made him quiet nevertheless; these fits of ill-humour and peevishness were certainly neither dignified nor manly.

"What have you done then? how have you arranged?" said Anne.

"Oh, we must wait, they say. If it had been merely a few months, or even a year, I should not have thought anything of it; but this indefinite delay—to be as patient and dignified as you like, Anne, it is very disagreeable and painful."

"I do not doubt it," said Anne.

"And so, till some further evidence of Norman's innocence can be procured—further! I should say until they can get *any* evidence—we must wait. James is to keep his eye on the district, he says, and lose no opportunity; that looks all very well, but if there *is* no evidence to be got, Alice and I may wait till our lives are spent in vain. It's very hard, Anne; I do say so, however boyish you may think it."

"I do not think *that* boyish, Lewis," said

Anne. "We must take measures more active than James's mere watching the district. Lewis, it is my turn to be called childish now. You must let me try—I must go to this place myself."

Lewis opened his eyes in consternation:

"*You* try! *you* go yourself! why, what on earth could *you* do? Anne, you are mad!"

"I am not mad, Lewis, in the least degree, and yet I *must* go to this place myself; it is not in self-confidence. I have patience more than you, and time less occupied; I never expected that this work could be done easily or soon. Lewis, *I* must go."

They were entering the house as Anne spoke. Lewis did not answer her. He only shook his head impatiently. There was something humiliating in the very idea that she could accomplish a thing in which he had failed.

He met his mother dutifully and with proper respect and kindness. Mrs. Aytoun's natural, unassuming dignity and entire sympathy with her children; the frank, affectionate, tender intercourse subsisting between them; the seemly regard for her opinion, which was no less apparent in her manly son, James, than in her gentle

daughter, Alice, had charmed Lewis unconsciously. The absolute propriety and fitness of that natural honour and reverence, made an involuntary impression upon him—an impression which now softened his voice and restrained his temper. With good training, and these righteous influences round him, Lewis was a hopeful subject yet.

"So you have returned as you went away?" said Mrs. Ross, when they had been some little time together.

"Yes," said Lewis, "I should say worse, for I had some hope then, and I have none now."

"I thought it was all nonsense," said Mrs. Ross. "I knew you could make nothing of it."

"You were wrong then, mother," said Lewis, quickly. "We have got no evidence—but *I* believe now, what I did not believe when we left Merkland, that Norman is innocent."

Anne looked up joyfully.

"Not that my believing it will do much good," said Lewis, "when such a thing as definite proof is not to be had; but that the man these people spoke of as young Redheugh

could do a deliberate and cowardly murder is nearly impossible."

"I thank you, Lewis!" exclaimed Anne. "I thank you for myself and for Norman!"

"But what good does it all do?" continued Lewis. "I may believe—but unless you can get other people to believe too, what is the use of it?"

"The use of it!" Anne's lightened heart and shining eye bore witness to its use. "James Aytoun believes it also," she said.

"Yes, James Aytoun believes it; but neither James nor you, Anne, will be satisfied with believing it yourselves. I don't see what we're to do. People judge by evidence—all the evidence is against him, and the only thing in his favour is an impression—well, I will go further—a kind of certainty—one can't give any reason for it, it is the merest indefinite, impalpable thing in the world. There's just a conviction that he is not guilty—there's nothing to support it."

"Well," said Anne, cheerfully; "but the evidence to support it must be got, Lewis. It is foolish to think that a work like this could

be done in so short a time, and with so small an expenditure of labour and patience. Your time is otherwise engaged—so is James Aytoun's—he has his business to manage—you, your estate. I have nothing. I am and have been all my life, a very useless person; let me have the satisfaction of being of some service for once in my life."

"Why, Anne," exclaimed Lewis, "are you in your senses? what in the world could you do? Do you think I could ever listen to such a thing? Nonsense, nonsense—mind your own affairs like a good girl, and do not meddle with what is quite out of your sphere."

Anne smiled, but with some pain—another person might have laughed frankly at the condescending superiority of the younger brother. It hurt her a little.

"Lewis, I have even more interest in this matter than you—many hopes there may be, and are, in your life. I have few. This of Norman's return is the greatest of all—and what concerns my brother cannot be out of my sphere."

"No—to wish for it—or to dream about it, or even to scheme for it," said Lewis, "that's

all very well; but for anything else—why, what could you do, Anne—what could any woman do? You know nothing of the laws of evidence—you don't know even how to make inquiries. You might go and spend money, and get the thing talked about, and written of in local newspapers. Content yourself, Anne, and leave it in our hands: you could do nothing more."

Alice Aytoun could have done nothing more. Anne Ross felt very certain that she had no gift for spending money and getting herself talked about—that it might be possible for her to do something more. So she said:

"You do not convince me, Lewis. To discover truth, one does not need to be familiar with laws of evidence. I am not a lawyer, and could not go as a lawyer would; but I am Norman's only sister, Lewis, and, as such, might find some fragments of truth favourable to him. I do not ask you to decide immediately—think of it, and then give me your sanction to my enterprise."

"I am perfectly amazed, Anne—quite astonished," exclaimed Mrs. Ross. "What can the girl be dreaming of? *you* go to collect evidence!—you accomplish what Lewis, and Mr. Aytoun,

and Robert Fergusson—trained lawyers, have failed to do! I never heard of such self-confidence. I cannot comprehend it."

Anne was roused out of her usual patience.

"Mother!" she said, "you have often called me very useless—I grant it, if you choose—I have at least not been undutiful. Hitherto, you know, I have been almost entirely guided by your pleasure. Here is one thing upon which I must exercise my own judgment—*must*, mother—it is no question of liking or disliking. I also have some affections, desires, wishes of my own. I am not merely an appendage—a piece of goods—forgive me if I speak hastily; but supposing that neither affection nor wish were in this matter, I have even a prior *duty* to Norman; I have my father's command. Mother, I am no longer a girl—there is some other duty for me now, than mere obedience; I have rendered you that for three-and-twenty years: do not grudge me some exercise of my own faculties now."

Mrs. Ross stared at her in open-eyed astonishment. Lewis had laughed at first—now he was graver. Mrs. Ross, with much obstinacy of her own, was one of those people who some-

times bluster, but always yield and quail before genuine, sober firmness.

"What do you mean? What do you wish to do?" she asked, peevishly, "Dutiful, obedient! ah, I have had a good daughter in you, without doubt! You are your brother's own sister. By all means, devote yourself to Norman. What right have I, who have only been a mother to you all your life, in comparison with this brother Norman, whom you never saw?"

Anne was already sorry for her outburst; yet, in spite of herself, felt indignant and impatient. This thraldom galled her grievously, yet she knew it to be a necessary result of her dependence.

"Stay, mother," said Lewis, "let me be peacemaker, for once. You forget how tired I am. Postpone your discussion till after dinner. We have had civil war long enough; let us have peace now."

Anne withdrew to her own room. So did Lewis; and the discussion was at an end.

"What should she do? The few shillings in the end of her purse were all inadequate for the journey, and the expense of residing, perhaps

for some considerable time, among strangers. That difficulty there was but one way of overcoming. Anne could not rely upon the generosity of Lewis, or his mother. To tell the truth, the finances of Merkland were in a state of considerable attenuation. But she could rely, without hesitation, upon Mrs. Catherine.

And there were further difficulties: how to go alone, and live alone, in the strange, unknown place: how to forsake her ordinary habits, and take to cottage visiting as indefatigably as an English Lady Bountiful. The first she was rather uneasy about; the second was a trifle. Things which were merely disagreeable, did not much distress Anne Ross: she was by no means in despair even at those which most people called impossible; but shrank with nervous delicacy from any, the very slightest, appearance of evil.

After dinner, the conversation was renewed. Lewis had been somewhat struck by Anne's assertion of some little claim to her own judgment. He certainly did not think her so wise as himself, but he knew her quite equal to various of his friends, whose claim to independent will and action was quite indisputable. Only,

she was a woman; that was all the difference. Lewis resolved to be very enlightened and liberal, to let his sister express her opinions freely, and himself to give a final and impartial deliverance upon them.

"Did I mention, in my last letter, the people who had been so intimate with Norman?" he asked, to begin.

"No," said Anne.

"An old woman referred us to them. She said it was a sister of theirs who was the occasion of the dispute between Aytoun and Norman; a poor girl who went to visit some friends in the west, about the time of the murder, and died there of a broken heart. One believes in such things when one hears stories like these. They live alone, in a great, gaunt old house, a brother and sister."

"And what?" said Anne, eagerly.

"Oh, nothing. I have no story to tell. We could gather nothing from them. The sister is a strange, emaciated, worn-out woman. James thought she looked agitated; but save a burst of broken praise of 'poor Redheugh'—I believe she even called him Norman—we elicited nothing more. The brother is an invalid and

hypochondriac; we caught a glimpse of him, once or twice, wandering on the beach, but never could address him. They seemed strange people, but had nothing to tell."

Anne did not speak. Her curiosity and interest were awakened.

"What a strange fellow," exclaimed Lewis, "that Norman must have been!"

"Strange!" said Mrs. Ross, "Yes, indeed, I should think he was. I know we had little peace in Merkland, before he came of age."

"How he managed to make the country people all so fond of him," continued Lewis, disregarding his mother's interruption, "one can't tell. And falling in love with a girl, of quite different rank. Altogether, it's a strange story."

"What was their name?" said Mrs. Ross. "I thought you said they lived in an old, great house, Lewis."

"So they do," said Lewis. "It is not their own, though. They pay some nominal rent, and take care of the place. Their name—what is their name?—upon my word I don't recollect. I don't know that I ever heard the surname I

remember the sister was called Miss Christian: but James will know."

"And you are sure they know nothing?" said Anne.

"Yes; at least the sister gave us no information, and the brother, as I told you, is a poor ailing creature—half crazy, the people say. He had saved an old man from drowning, shortly before we reached the place, and was very much elated about it."

"And their sister?" said Anne.

"Their sister was a very gentle, sweet girl—so runs the story—and was much attached to Norman. The news of his flight was carried to her abruptly by some officious person, and the consequence was, that the poor girl broke her heart, and died. It is a very sad story. Alice seemed to be able for nothing but crying when I told her."

Anne was ruminating in wonder and doubt—who then was the "Marion?" It was impossible that this truthful, upright Norman should have his troth plighted to two! Impossible that he could play one false! The doubt made her heart sink: the weight of one sin is

so much heavier than the burden of a hundred misfortunes.

"Now, Anne," said Lewis, "what has become of your famous resolution? Has your heart failed you already? I am glad of it: better faint before you enter the wood, than when you are on the way."

"I have no idea of fainting at all," said Anne, "unless, indeed, when we have fairly emerged into the clear air again, with Norman honourably in his own house, and Alice at Merkland—I may have leisure for fainting then. Now, Lewis—listen to me, I beg, mother—I want you to consent that I should go to this place—to Aberford—immediately, or if not immediately, at least soon. Let me have some one with me—May would do, or old Esther Fleming. I can take quiet lodgings and live there, professedly for the sake of sea air, if, indeed, any pretence is necessary. Once there, with no other claim on my time, and patience enough to bear any ordinary disagreeables, I may make quiet, noiseless, unsuspected investigations. Let me try: the matter is of consequence to us all, and the expense will not be great. I beg that I may not be hindered

from making this endeavour—it may produce something—and if it does not, there is nothing lost."

"Upon my word you take it very coolly," said Mrs. Ross. "I should like to know why my son's means should be wasted in such an absurd expedition. You will never make anything of it, it is quite nonsense: besides, the idea of a girl going away from home, and living alone, engaged in such a search!—perfectly improper! I am amazed at you, Anne!"

Anne blushed deeply. It might, indeed, be called improper and indecorous, and she was not given to neglect the veriest outer garment and vesture of good fame; but for this, a matter so very dear and precious, involving so many interests, a mere punctilio might surely be disregarded—a ceremonial dispensed with.

"Mother!" she said, "if I were ill, you would not object to this: on the mere order of a doctor, you would have thought it perfectly proper to suffer me to go to the sea-side: how much more now, when interests so great are at stake—Lewis and Norman—your hope and mine! Mother! let me have your consent."

Lewis was touched. This Norman, whom

she emphatically called her hope, did not live at all in Anne's remembrance, except in the merest shadow. He began to perceive how void of personal hopes and joys her life was. There were some—deeper, graver, more earnest than his—foremost among them, the deliverance and return of this exile brother; should he, her nearest relative, dim and darken this great hope for her? Lewis forgot himself, and his forgetfulness ennobled him,

"Anne," he said, "let us speak of this hereafter—nay, I mean soon; but not—" he glanced at his mother, "not to-night."

Anne understood, and was satisfied. Lewis had turned peace-maker. Lewis was devising means to turn his mother's ill-humour and undeserved reproofs from her. All honour and praise to that kindly household of Aytouns; the manly son, the gracious mother, the gentle little girl, Alice, who had found out for him, and brought into the pleasant air of day, the hidden heart of Lewis Ross.

The next morning, Lewis himself proposed a consultation with Mrs. Catherine. Anne consented gladly, and they set out. The Oran was frozen hard, and lay, a glittering road of

ice, far below the high pathway of crisp snow they were walking on, through which the topmost branches of the buried hedge peered forth like wayside weeds. The snow lay three or four feet deep, and it was intensely cold.

They found Mrs. Catherine in her ruddy inner room, hemming fine cambric still. In the one article of linen, Archibald Sutherland was not likely to find himself deficient for years. Lewis gave in his report. Mrs. Catherine was disappointed.

"But it is no marvel to me, mind, though you yourself, Lewis, are in trouble, as I see, that your skill, and wisdom, and great experience, have failed in the first trial. Take good heart, callant; when ye have come to years, ye will ken that men are not wont to win the head of the brae, in the first trial. Set your breast to it, man; begin again."

"Why we have done everything, Mrs. Catherine," said Lewis.

"Ay! you are a clever chield, Lewis Ross. Is it a month since the two callants went away, Gowan? Truly, I had no thought there were two such giants under my roof yon bright January day—dune everything!—in four haill

weeks! It is a comfort to folk of an older generation, that have worn out lifetimes at one labour, to hear tell of the like of that."

Lewis did not know whether to laugh, or to be angry: acting on his new notions of manliness, he chose the former. "Of course, Mrs. Catherine, I mean everything we could do."

"Lewis," said Mrs. Catherine, "ye are wrong; there is no man in this world—at least, I have never heard name nor fame of him—that did everything he could do in such a space of time; it is a delusion of youthheid. Ye have girded yourself for the race, and have run hard for one mile; ye think ye have dune all. Callant! ye are neither footsore, nor weary, nor sick at heart; what ails ye to go on? I have kent folk struggling hard, that were all the three. Turn back, Lewis Ross, and begin again."

"Mrs. Catherine," said Anne, "if Lewis returned, it would excite curiosity; their investigations have aroused attention already. I think it would not be wise. We came to consult you on a plan of mine. Mrs. Catherine, they say, despairing men venture on forlorn hopes often. I am not despairing, I am only

useless; but I want Lewis to entrust this forlorn hope to me."

"And I," said Lewis, "think it is a very foolish idea; but yet have no reasonable defence to offer against it."

Mrs. Catherine looked at Anne earnestly.

"Are ye able? that ye would endeavour this I never doubted—have ye strength for it?"

"I? I am strong," said Anne, "you know that, Mrs. Catherine. I scarcely know what sickness is."

Mrs. Catherine touched, with her fingers, the smooth, clear cheek, which testified the firm and elastic health, both physical and mental, of its owner, and yet was so far removed from robustness.

"Gowan, I believe ye are able; ye have my full consent, and God-speed. Mind you, what I have said to Lewis; it's no one trial, or two, or three—time and patience, thought and labour; ye must grudge none of them all. Tell me your plan."

"Must we submit?" said Lewis. "Anne, is Mrs. Catherine's judgment final? is there no appeal?"

"Whisht!" said Mrs. Catherine, peremptorily; "wha was speaking of appeal or judgment? There is a work to do, Lewis Ross; the thing is to get the fittest workman, and beware how we hinder him of his labour. We have tarried long enough; this is no a time to put further barriers in the road. Gowan, your plan?"

"I propose going to Aberford," said Anne; "taking some trusty person with me, Mrs. Catherine. It is common, I hear, for people to go there, who seek sea air. I shall attract no attention; it does not matter much how long I stay. I can establish myself under the wing of some matron, and so escape the charge of impropriety. Then I shall go about the district, make acquaintance with every one to whom I can have access, and inquire with all zeal and all quietness. While questions from Lewis, and a lawyer-like person, like James Aytoun, might confuse the people, they will speak frankly to me. I will gossip with them, play with their children; get all possible scraps of recollectings and imaginings, and, perhaps, when the heap is winnowed, something worth going for."

Mrs. Catherine bent her head gravely, and asked: "When?"

"Immediately," said Anne; "at least, I should desire so. We have lost much time already."

Mrs. Catherine rose, and went to the window. The sky was heavy and dark, lowering like some great gloomy forehead. It was laden with snow —large, dilated flakes, like those of fire upon Dante's burning sand were falling, one by one, upon the white earth. It was a feeding storm.

"Bonnie weather for the sea-side," said Mrs. Catherine, returning to her seat. "Ye must go with a good excuse, Gowan, no with an apparent falset on your tongue. 'February fills the dyke, either with black or white.' We are getting baith of them this month. March is a blustering, wintry time, when there is little to be seen or heard tell of about the coast but shipwreck and disaster. April is pleasant in a landward place. Ye *may* go in April; it is too soon, but for the necessity's sake ye may go then—no a day sooner, at your peril. Ye are able and well? I ken your look, Gowan—hold your peace. I wad give a good year of my life—and

I have few of them to spare, seeing I am trysted to abide in my present tabernacle, if the Lord will, till Archie Sutherland has won back his land—to see Norman Rutherford a free man on Oranside again; but I will not consent to put you in peril, Gowan, for any unkent good. I say ye shall go in April. I put my interdict upon ye venturing before. I will give ye your freedom in the last blast of the borrowing days. No an hour sooner. Now, will ye abide by my judgment, or will ye no?"

Anne looked out uneasily. The heavy sky slowly beginning to discharge its load—the earth everywhere covered with that white, warm mantle—the gradually increasing storm. She submitted. Now at least it was impossible to go.

Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Catherine took her into another room, and interrogated her concerning her pecuniary arrangements for the journey. Anne evaded the question, laughed at the scanty family of shillings in her own purse, and spoke of Lewis.

"Gowan, ye are a gowk after all," said Mrs. Catherine. "The lad needs all his siller for

himself. If there is anything to spare, let him ware it on bonnie dies to dress his bit little bride withal—though the bairn Alison has a natural grace, and needs them less than most. But if ye say a word about siller to Lewis, ye shall never enter my door again. Mind! It is my wont to keep my word."

Within a week after this conversation, the last half of Mrs. Catherine's prodigal outfit was hurriedly sent to Glasgow, where Archibald Sutherland had made his first beginning with success and honour. The cold lodging, to whose narrow and solitary fireside he returned, night after night, alone—the fat, Glasgow landlady, whose broad, good-humoured face began to smile upon him with a familiar kindliness, which the broken laird blamed himself for almost shrinking from—the life of strange labour—he was getting accustomed to them all.

The house which he had entered was a great one. The senior partner, Mr. Sutor, a man of good mercantile descent, and capital business-head, lived at a considerable distance from Glasgow, in one of those magnificent solitudes of hill and water, whither the merchants of St.

Mungo are wont to carry their genial wealth, and their fine houses. It was within convenient distance of the "Saut Water," that irresistible temptation and delight of every genuine Glaswegian. Mr. Sutor came up frequently to business; he was still the active sagacious head of his extensive establishment. The manager, Mr. George Lumsden, was as great a man in his way. He lived in the dignified vicinity of Blytheswood Square. He had a fine house, a well-dressed pretty wife, and beautiful children; gave good dinners; visited baillies and town-councillors, and had baillies and town-councillors visiting him, and was certain in a very short time, to have his respectable name introduced into the firm. He was moreover an active, intelligent man, almost intellectual in spite of those absorbing cares of business, and worthy to call the minister of Portoran brother. Had Archibald chosen, he might have made a tolerably good *entrée* into the society of Glasgow, in the hospitable house of Mr. Lumsden; but Archibald did not choose. His former folly, illness, and repentance had both sobered and saddened him, and he desired to avoid society—

a desire which Mr. Lumsden kindly perceived; and after one or two unhappy evenings, during which the sensitive young man had endured in exquisite pain "the pity of the crowd," and suffered the sympathy of indifferent strangers, Mr. Lumsden forbore pressing further invitations upon him.

Messrs. Sutor and Sinclair's office was filled with young men—very young men, most of them—adventurous scions of commercial Glasgow families, foredoomed to push their fortunes, and to push them successfully in every quarter of the globe. Youths who made immense havoc among "grossets," strawberries, and all other delicacies of the luxurious summer-time, sacred to Clydesdale orchards, and radiant with the crowning glory of the Saut Water; nor in the gloomier season did less execution among edibles and drinkables, by no means so delicate or innocent—uproarious, laughter-loving, practical-joking youths, among whose noisy conclave Archibald Sutherland sat silent, grave, and sad, in strange solitude.

Thoroughly respectable they would all be by-and-by, on English 'Change and foreign market-

place, and home counting-house—men who could lose some few thousands without much discomposure, and whose custom was to win them in tens and twenties. Yet one could pass so lightly over these ruddy faces, to rest upon that pale one among them, with its secret history—its grief—its hope—altogether forgetful that this was a hired clerk, and that the cubs were young gentlemen, taken in at nominal salaries, to learn their craft, and saving Mr. Sutor no inconsiderable annual sum in the salaries of other hired clerks, whose services his great business must have demanded but for them.

But Archibald discharged his duty well: so well, that Mr. Lumsden formally pronounced his satisfaction—shortened his probation—and when he had been but a month in the Glasgow counting-house, bade him prepare immediately for his voyage. Archibald did so: wrote a long letter, and received a short note of leave-taking from his sister Isabel—the much-admired and gay Mrs. Duncombe—packed up his great outfit, placed in his pocket-book Mrs. Catherine's long letter of pithy counsel and tender kindliness; with these few words of grave farewell from

Merkland; and on a heavy day in February, took his last look of the fair West Country, and its beautiful Clyde, and set sail for the New World.

CHAPTER VI.

"A strong, brave soul,
Born unto joyous labour—dedicate
Unto the noblest chivalry of earth,
The Lord's crusade of mercy."

Mr. Lumsden, of Portoran, was seated in his study. The March wind was blustering, boisterous and rude without, driving its precious dust, so valuable, as the proverb says, to farmer and seedsman, upon the window. The study of the Portoran Manse was by no means a luxurious place—there were no reclining library chairs in it; the formidable volumes that clothed its walls were such, as no *dilettanti* student would venture to engage

withal. Its furniture was of the plainest. One large respectable looking glazed bookcase, and a multitude of auxiliary shelves, were piled to overflowing with books—books worth one's while to look at, though Russia leather and gilding were marvellously scant among them. That glorious row of tall vellum-covered folios—Miss Lumsden tells a story of them—how they were presented to her studious brother John, the day he was licensed, by a wealthy elder (to whom be all honour and laud, and many followers); and how John, in the mightiness of his glee, forgetful of the new dignity of his Reverend, fairly danced round the ponderous volumes in overbrimming pride and exultation. Miss Lumsden's studious brother John, sits listening the while, with his own peculiar smile upon his face—a smile which gives to that dark, penetrating, intellectual countenance a singular fascination—there is something in the simplicity of its glee, which at once suits so well and contrasts so strangely with his strong and noble character.

For Mr. Lumsden, of Portoran, was altogether a peculiar man; we are sorry that we cannot venture to call him a type of the clergymen of

Scotland; he was not a type of any body or profession. You will find rare individuals of his class here and there, but nowhere many. That there were such things as fatigue and weariness, Mr. Lumsden knew—he had heard of them, with the hearing of the ear, and believed in their existence as on good testimony we believe that there are mountains in the moon; but Mr. Lumsden regarded people who complained much of these with a smile, half-pitying, half-incredulous, and met the idea of himself suffering from them with a no less amused burst of open wonder than if it had been suggested to him that he should hold a diet of examination, on some chill hillside of the pale planet over us. The laborious duties of a brave and faithful minister were very life and breath to Mr. Lumsden, of Portoran—obstacles that discouraged every other man did only pleasantly excite and stimulate his patient might of labour. Weary work, from which all beside him turned disconsolate and afraid, Mr. Lumsden swept down upon, his face radiant with all its frank simplicity of glee. Nothing daunted the mighty, vigorous, healthful soul within him—nothing cast down that great, broad, expansive power

of Hope, which was with him no fair beguiling fairy, but an athletic spirit, greedy of labour as the elfin serving-man of Michael Scot. In labours manifold the minister of Portoran spent his manly days; foremost in every good work, valiantly at the head of every Christian enterprise, and full of that high religious chivalry which dares all things in the service of the Church and of the Church's Head.

The widow and the fatherless knew well the firm footstep of their faithful friend and comforter; the poor of his parish claimed his kindly service as a public property; no man seeking counsel or help, comfort or assistance, went doubtingly to the Manse of Portoran. The minister—his wisdom, his influence, his genial large heart, belonged to the people; he was the first person sought in misfortune, the first to whom sorrow was unfolded. In a great joy the people of Portoran might forget him—they never forgot to warn him of the coming of grief.

Mr. Lumsden was seated in his study—a great quarto of ponderous Latin divinity, the produce of that busy time after the Reformation, when divines *did* write in quarto and folio

volumes, terrible to look upon in these degenerate days, lay on the table before him. He was not reading it, however; he was pulling on his boot, and looking at an open note which lay upon the book.

One boot was already on—he was tugging at the other indignantly. Mr. Lumsden was particularly extravagant in that article of boots —so much so, as entirely to shock his prudent sister Martha. This one, which would not be drawn on, had been out during the night, upon its master's foot, trudging through all manner of wet by-ways to a sick-bed—it had not yet recovered the drenching. So Mr. Lumsden pulled, and between the pulls looked at the note, and muttered to himself words which his correspondent would not have cared to hear.

Miss Lumsden entered the study. Miss Lumsden had seen out her fortieth winter; for the last ten of these, she had worn one constant dress of black silk, and pronounced herself an old woman; and as it was very much for the benefit of her married sisters and unmarried brothers that she should think so, no

one contradicted her. It happened at this time, to be John's turn to have the noted housekeeper of the Lumsden family resident with him. The Manse of Gowdenleas in the rich plains of Mid Lothian, and the Manse of Kilfleurs in the West Highlands, the respective residences of her brothers Robert and Andrew, were under an interregnum. Mrs. Edie *née* Lumsden, in her Fife Manse, had no expectation of a new baby; Mrs. Gilmour the Edinburgh physician's wife, had no sickness among her seven children; Mrs. Morton, the great invalid, whose husband held an office in the Register House was much better than could be expected; so the universally useful sister Martha had time to bestow her care and attention upon the domestic comfort of her brother John.

The boot suddenly relaxed as Miss Lumsden entered, and the shock brought out her brother's muttering in a louder tone than he intended: "A pretty fellow!"

"Who is that?" asked his sister.

Mr. Lumsden looked up, flushed with exertion. "This lord at Strathoran. Take

his note—a seemly thing indeed to write so to me; Marjory Falconer is right after all—the man thinks himself a Highland chieftain."

Miss Lumsden read the note, wonderingly.

"Sir.

"My people inform me that you are in the habit of visiting my tenants at Oranmore, and inciting them to a course of action quite subversive of my plans. I am informed that the glen is in the parish of Strathoran, and consequently under the charge of another clergymen—the Rev. Mr. Bairnsfather—whose own good sense and proper feeling have withheld him from any interference between myself and my dependants. I am not inclined to submit to any clerical meddling, and therefore beg to remind you, that as Oranmore is not under your charge, any interference on your part is perfectly uncalled for and officious. I do not choose to have any conventicles in the glen, and trust that you will at once refrain from visits, which may injure the people but can do them no good.

"I am, &c.

"GILLRAVIDGE."

"Did ever any mortal hear such impertinence?" exclaimed the amazed Miss Lumsden.

"*His* people!" said the minister: "they have been his a long time to be so summarily dealt with as goods and chattels. The man must have got his ideas of Scotland from 'Waverley,' and thinks he is a Glennaquoich and at the head of a clan—what absurd folly it is!"

"And just, 'Sir!'" said Miss Lumsden, indignantly; "he might have had the good breeding to call you 'Reverend' at least."

Mr. Lumsden laughed. He rose and changed the long black garment, once a great-coat, now his study-coat and morning-undress, for habiliments better suiting the long ride he was about to commence, twisted his plaid round his neck, and shut his quarto.

"What do you intend to do, John?" asked Miss Lumsden. "Are you going out?"

"I intend to do just what I should have done, had I not received this polite note," said Mr. Lumsden. "I am going to Oranmore, Martha. This lordling threatens to eject these hapless Macalpines, and poor Kenneth, the widow's son, is on the very verge of the grave.

I must see him to-day. If they attempt to remove him, it will kill the lad."

"Remove them, John? what are you thinking of?" said Miss Lumsden: "it is nearly three months yet to the term."

The minister shook his head.

"They were warned to quit at Martinmas, Martha. This man, Lord Gillravidge, has his eyes open to his own advantage. He has been advised, I hear, to make one great sheep-farm of these exposed hill-lands. The poor little clachan of Oranmore could not believe that those fearful notices were anything but threats to secure the payment of their rent; but now they promise to turn very sad earnest. I do not know what to do."

"Eject them?" said Miss Lumsden, "bring one of those terrible Irish scenes to our very door—in our peaceable country? John, it's not possible!"

Mr. Lumsden looked still more serious.

"I fear it is nearly certain, Martha. I met Big Duncan Macalpine on the road last night. He says Lord Gillravidge's agent and that fellow with the moustache, have been in the glen several times of late; and the ejectment must be

accomplished before their seed is sown. At least if they are permitted to remain till after seed-time, the man will not surely have the heart to remove them then. I do not know—it is a very sad business altogether; but we must try to do something better for them than sending them, friendless and penniless, to Canada. We get a trial of all businesses, we ministers, Martha—this is a new piece of work for me."

The minister's man stood at the door, holding the minister's stout, gray pony. Mr. Lumsden left the room. "And a great comfort it is, John my man," soliloquized his sister, "that your Master has made you able for them all."

Oranmore was not in Mr. Lumsden's parish. Mr. Lumsden was, what in those days was called a "Highflyer," that is, a purely and earnestly evangelical minister—a man who dedicated his whole energies, not to any abstraction of merely beautiful morality—not to amiable respectability, nor temporal beneficence; but in the fullest sense of these solemn words, to the cause and service of Christ. In consequence, Mr. Lumsden was assailed with all the names peculiarly assigned to his class by common con-

sent of the world: sour Presbyterian, gloomy Calvinist, narrow-minded bigot, illiberal Pharisee. The minister of Portoran, like his brethren in all ages, escaped thus the woe denounced by his Master against those of whom all men speak well.

He was a thorough Presbyterian, a sound Calvinist. Men who know, and may rationally judge of these two stately systems of discipline and doctrine, can decide best whether the frank and open pleasantness of Mr. Lumsden's face belied his faith or no. He was a man of one idea—we confess to that; but the mightiness that filled his mind was great enough to overbrim a universe. It was the Gospel—the Gospel in its infinite breadth of lovingness—the Gospel no less in its restrictions and penalties. His hand did not willingly extend itself in fellowship to any man who dishonoured the name of his Divine leader and King. His soul was not sufficiently indifferent to prophesy final blessedness to those who contemned and set at nought the everlasting love of God—so far he was narrow-minded and illiberal, a bigot and a Pharisee.

But it happened that Mr. Lumsden's co-

presbyters on every side were men called, in the emphatic ecclesiastical phraseology of Scotland, "Moderates;" men who wrote sermons and preached them because it was a necessity of their office, not because they had a definite message to deliver from a Lord and Master known and beloved; men who tolerated profanity, and hushed uncomfortable fears, and were themselves so very moderately religious, as to give no manner of offence to that most narrow-minded and illiberal of all bigots, the irreligious world. We mention this, in explanation of a foible of Mr. Lumsden's, particularly alluded to in the letter of Lord Gillravidge, and the cause of much skirmishing in the Presbytery of Strathoran. Mr. Lumsden had an especial knack of preaching in other people's parishes.

Not to the neglect of his own—of all kinds of dishonour or ill-fame, Mr. Lumsden held none so grievous as the neglecting or slight performance of any part of that honourable and lofty work of his. Dearly as he loved extraneous labour, the minutest of his own especial parochial duties were looked to first. But all his round of toil gone through; his sermons

prepared; his examinations held; himself, heart and mind, at the constant service of his people, Mr. Lumsden thought it no longer necessary to confine his marvellous appetite for work within the limits of Portoran. There was a heathenish village yonder, growing up in all the rude brutality of rural vice, untaught and uncared for. What matter that the privilege of instructing it belonged to the Reverend Michael Drowsihed? The Reverend Michael awoke out of his afternoon sleep one day in wrath and consternation. Mr. Lumsden, of Portoran, had established a fortnightly sermon, and threatened to set down a daily school, in his own neglected village. What matter, that the half-Gaelic colony of Oranmore, belonged of right to Mr. Bairnsfather? The warm heart of the Minister of Portoran was labouring in the cause of the Macalpines, while Mr. Bairnsfather was "sheughing kail and laying leeks," in his own Manse garden.

In consequence of which propensity, Mr. Lumsden made a mighty commotion in that ecclesiastical district. Gratefully to his ears, as he wended homeward, came the voice of psalms from peasant-households, whom his faithful

service had brought back to the devout and godly habits of their forefathers. Pleasantly before him stood, in rustic bashfulness, the ruddy village children, for whom his care and labours had procured an education of comparative purity: but by no means either grateful or pleasant were those endless battles convulsing his presbytery, shaking study chairs in drowsy Manses, and sweeping in a perfect whirlwind of complaint and reprimand through the Presbytery House of Portoran.

Mr. Lumsden had his failings—we do not deny it. He had no especial shrinking from a skirmish in the Presbytery. He walked to the bar of that reverend court with so very little awe, that the Moderator was well-nigh shocked out of his propriety. He had even been heard irreverently to suggest to the newly-placed Minister of Middlebury, a young brother, who seemed rather inclined to abet him in his rebellion, that it would be better for him to take his place permanently at the bar, than to be called to it at every meeting. He had been reprimanded by the Presbytery, till the Presbytery were tired of reprimanding. Mr. Bairnsfather had carried the case to the Synod, by appeal.

The Synod had denounced his irregularities in its voice of thunder. Mr. Lumsden only smiled his peculiar smile of gleeful simplicity, and went on with his labour.

He was going now to Oranmore. The glen of Oranmore lay among the lower heights of the Grampians, a solitary, secluded valley. A small colony of Highlanders, attached to the Strathoran branch of the house of Sutherland, in feudal times, and bearing the ancient name of Macalpine, had settled there, nearly a century before. The patriarchs of the little community still spoke their original Gaelic; but the younger generations, parents and children, approached much more closely to their Lowland neighbours, whose idiom they had adopted. The glen was entirely in their hands, and its fields, reclaimed by their pains-taking husbandry, produced their entire subsistence. Some flocks of sheep grazed on the hillside. There was good pasture land for their cattle, and the various patches of oats and barley, turnips and potatoes, were enough to keep these sturdy cottar families in independent poverty. Whether in other circumstances they might have displayed the inherent indolence which belongs, as men say, to that

much belied Celtic race, we cannot tell. But having only ordinary obstacles to strive against —an indulgent landlord, and a kindly factor— the Macalpines had maintained themselves as sturdily as any Saxon tribe of their numbers could possibly have done; and had, what Saxon hamlets in the richer South are not wont to have, a couple of lads from their little clachan at college—one preparing himself for the work of the ministry, and another aspiring to the dignity of an M.D.

In summer time, these peaceful cot-houses, lying on either side of the infant Oran, within the shadow of the hills, with the fair low country visible from the end of the glen, and the stern Grampians rising to the sky above, were very fair to look upon; and the miniature clan at its husbandry, working in humble brotherhood —the link of kindred that joined its dozen families, all inheriting one name and one blood —the purer atmosphere of morality and faith among them—made the small commonwealth of Oranmore a pleasant thing for the mind to rest upon, no less than for the eye.

Mr. Fergusson had never dealt hardly with these honest Macalpines, in regard to the rent

of their small holdings. He knew they would pay it when they could, and, in just confidence, he gave them latitude. Unhappily for the Macalpines, one whole half-year's rent remained unpaid, when the new landlord took the management out of Mr. Fergusson's kindly hands. The year was a backward year: their crops had been indifferent, and the Macalpines were not ready with their rent at Martinmas.

The consequence was, that these fearful notices to quit were served upon them. Big Duncan Macalpine, a man of very decided character and deep piety—one of that class, who, further north, are called "the men,"—perceived the alien Laird's intention of removing them at once. The remainder of the humble people, looked upon the notices only as threats, and set to with all industry to make up the rents, and prevent the dread alternative of leaving their homes. They had come there in the time of Laird Fergus, the great-grandfather of Archibald Sutherland. Their ninety-nine years' lease had expired in the previous year, and had not (for it was Archibald's dark hour) been renewed, so that now they were the merest tenants at will. Mr. Foreman warned

Big Duncan that they might be ejected at any time.

The small community became alarmed. The big wheel was busy in every cottage. Sheep and poultry were being sold; every family was ready to make sacrifices for the one great object of keeping their lands and homes. The sharp, keen, unscrupulous writer whom Lord Gillravidge had employed in Edinburgh, where his over-acuteness had lost him caste and character, had been seen in the glen for three successive days. The Macalpines were smitten with dread. Rumours floated up into their hilly solitude of a great sheep-farmer from the south, who was in treaty for these hill-lands of Strathoran. A shadow fell upon the humble households. The calamity that approached began to shape itself before them. To leave their homes—the glen to which they clung with all the characteristic tenacity of their race—the country for which the imaginative Celtic spirit burned with deep and patriotic love—the national faith, still dearer, and more precious—for a cold, unknown, and strange land, far from their northern birth-place, and their preached Gospel!

Mr. Lumsden's strong, gray pony was used to

all manner of rough roads, and so could climb along the craggy way that led to Oranmore. The minister rode briskly into the glen. His keen and anxious look became suddenly changed as he entered it into one of grief and indignation. He quickened his pace, leaped from the saddle, fastened his pony to a withered thorn, and hastened forward.

The crisis had come. Mr. Whittret the lawyer, and Mr. Fitzherbert, stood in the middle of a knot of Macalpines; a party of sheriff's-officers hung in the rear, and the youthful Giles Sympelton stood apart, looking on. The high head of Duncan Macalpine towered over the rest. In his moral chieftainship he was the spokesman of his neighbours. He was speaking when Mr. Lumsden approached.

"Your rent is ready, Sir—the maist of us are ready with your rent; but oh! if there is a heart of flesh within ye, spare us our hames! Gentlemen, we have a' been born here. Yon auld man," and Duncan pointed to the venerable white head of a trembling old man, wrapped in a plaid, who leaned against the lintel of the nearest cottage—"and he's past a century—is the

only ane amang us that was a living soul at the flitting. For pity's sake, Sir, think o't! Gie us time to make up the siller. We'll pay the next half-year in advance, if better mayna be; but do not bid us leave the glen."

"That's all very well," said Fitzherbert, "very pretty. A set of Scotch cheats, who only want to deceive Lord Gillravidge."

"I want to deceive no man," said the humble chief of Oranmore, indignantly. "I wouldna set my face to a lee for a' his revenues. I am a head of a family, and a decent man, in God's providence, Sir; and I gie ye my word, that if ye'll just give us time, we'll mak up the next half-year's rent in advance. His Lordship is a stranger, and, maybe, doesna ken whether he can trust us or no. Mr. Fergusson will bear us witness, Sir—the Laird himsel will bear us witness. Mr. Lumsden—Guid be thankit he is here himsel!—the minister will bear us witness!"

Mr. Lumsden entered the circle, hailed by various salutations. "Blessings on him! He never fails when he's needed." "He'll bear witness to us that we're honest folk."

And one indignant outcry from Duncan's sister: "Ye'll believe the minister!"

"What is the matter, Duncan?" said Mr. Lumsden.

"The gentlemen have come for our rent, Sir; we're ahin' hand. I make nae wonder that folk new to the countryside mayna trust us; but oh! if they would but pit us on trial. I promise, in the name of all in the glen—ye're a' hearing me?—that, though it should take our haill substance, we'll pay the siller just and faithfully, as we have aye dune, if we only can bide upon our ain land."

"*Your* own land!" echoed Fitzherbert. "Fellow! the land is Lord Gillravidge's."

Big Duncan Macalpine's honest face flushed deeply.

"I am nae fellow, Sir; and the land belangs to us by an aulder tenure than can give it to ony foreign lord. We are clansmen of the Laird's. Langsyne our chief sold our land further north—instead of it we got this glen. I say, Sir, that the land is ours. We were born and bred in it; our fathers fought for it langsyne. We hold it on an auld tenure—aulder than ony lordship in thae pairts. Our forebears were

content to follow their chief when he threw his ain hills into the hands of strangers. We got this instead of our auld inheritance. I say, Sir, that the land is ours—that no man has a right to take it from us. Mr. Whittret, ye're a lawyer—am I no speaking true?"

"Bah! You're a cheat!" exclaimed Fitzherbert.

Big Duncan's muscular arm shook nervously. He restrained himself with an effort. Not so his vehement sister Jean.

"Wha daurs say sic a name to Duncan Macalpine? Wha daurs disbelieve his word, standing in Oranmore? A feckless, ill-favoured fuil, wi' as muckle hair about the filthy face o' him as wad hang him up in a tree, as the prodigal Absalom hung langsyne. A cheat! If Big Duncan Macalpine wasna caring mair for his folk and name than for himsel, ye wad hae been spinning through the air afore now, in your road to the low country, ye ill-tongued loon!"

"Whisht, Jean!—whisht!" said her brother. "What needs we heed ill words? We're langer kent in Oranside than the gentleman."

Duncan drew himself up in proud dignity.

The puny "gentleman"—a thing of yesterday—was insignificant in the presence of the cottar of Oranmore—a true heritor of the soil.

"You do not mean, gentleman," said Mr. Lumsden,—"I trust you do not mean to take any extreme proceedings. I rejoice to be able to give my testimony to the sterling honour and integrity of Duncan Macalpine and his kinsmen of Oranmore. Lord Gillravidge cannot have better, or more honourable tenants. I entreat —I beg that time may be given them to make a representation of their case to his Lordship. He is new to the country, and may not know that these men are not ordinary tenants—that they have, as they truly say, a right to the soil. Mr. Whittret, you cannot refuse them your influence with Lord Gillravidge—you know their peculiar claim?"

"They might have a claim upon Mr. Sutherland," said the agent, gloomily. "They can have none upon Lord Gillravidge."

"Lord Gillravidge is bound to preserve ancient rights," exclaimed Mr. Lumsden. "It is not possible he can know the circumstances. These men are not ordinary cottars, Mr. Whitt-

ret—you understand their position. For pity's sake, do not drive them to extremity!"

"It cannot be helped," said Mr. Whittret, bending his dark brows, and shunning the clear eye of the minister: "I must adhere to my instructions, Sir. These hill-lands are already let to a stock-farmer. I must proceed."

"There can be no need for haste, at least," said Mr. Lumsden. "The new tenant cannot enter till Whit-Sunday. Let the Macalpines stay—let them remain until the term."

Mr. Whittret lifted his eyes in furtive malice, with a glance of that suspicious cunning which perpetually fancies it is finding others out.

"And have Lord Gillravidge called a tyrant and oppressor for removing the people after their seed is sown? You are very good, Mr. Lumsden—we know how clerical gentlemen can speak. We shall take our own plan. Simpson, begin your work."

A detached cottage, the furthest out of the group, stood close upon the Oran—the narrow streamlet, a mere mountain burn so near its source, was spanned there by white stepping-stones. A woman in a widow's cap stood at the cottage-door, looking out with a silent want

of wonder, which told plainly enough that some mightier interest prevented her from sharing in the excitement of her neighbours. The men approached the house, and after summoning her to leave it instantly, a summons which the poor woman heard in vacant astonishment, immediately prepared to unroof her humble habitation. The crowd of Macalpines had been looking on in breathless silence. Now there was a wild shriek of excitement and fury—men and women precipitated themselves at once upon the minions of that ruthless law which was not justice. The ladder was thrown down; the hapless officer who had been the first to mount it, struggled in the hands of two strong young men; and Jean Macalpine, a tall athletic woman, stood before the terrified widow in the doorway, another officer prostrate at her feet. Mr. Fitzherbert and Whittret rushed forward—their satellites formed themselves together for resistance—the Macalpines furiously surrounded the cottage—there promised to be a general *mêlée*. But loud above the noise and tumult sounded the united voices of Big Duncan, and his minister.

"Jean Macalpine," shouted the chief of

Oranmore, "come out from among this senseless fray. Dugald Macalpine, quit the man: why will ye pollute your hands striving with him? Donald Roy, let go your hold. Gentlemen, gentlemen, haud your hands, and hear me."

There was a momentary truce.

"Beware!" said Mr. Lumsden. "Within that house lies an invalid—if you expose that sinking lad, you will have a death to answer for. I tell you, beware!"

"Gentlemen," said Big Duncan Macalpine, "yon house upon the knowe is mine. I protest, in the name of my people, that ye are doing an unrighteous and unlawful thing. I beg ye, as ye are Christian men, that ken what hames are, to let us bide in our ain glen and country. In honour, and honesty, and leal service we will pay ye for your mercy; but if ye are determined to carry on this work, unrighteous as it is in the sight of God and man, begin yonder—take my house. I was born in it—I thocht to die in it—begin with my house; but if ye would escape a curse and desolation, leave the hame of the widow."

There was a pause—the invading party were

in a dilemma. The very officials were moved by the manly disinterestedness of Big Duncan Macalpine. He himself strode to the side of the lads who had pulled the man from the ladder, and freed him from their grasp: then he gathered the Macalpines together, spoke a word of comfort to the widow, and placing himself by the door of her cottage, looked calmly towards his own house and waited.

Mr. Whittret stood undecided. Fitzherbert was furious. He had already issued his orders to the men to proceed, when his arm was grasped from behind. He turned round—the Honourable Giles Sympelton was at his elbow, his simple youthful face quivering with emotion.

"Fitz, Fitz," cried the lad, "stop this—I cannot bear it. I will not see it; if you destroy that noble fellow's house, I will never enter Gillravidge's again. Take care what you do—they are better men than we."

Mr. Whittret looked up. Mr. Lumsden had his note-book in his hand, and was writing. The mean soul of the agent writhed within him. That Mr. Lumsden was writing an exposure of his conduct he never doubted; he

would be covered with infamy and shame; at least it should not be without cause. "Simpson," he cried, "take the fellow at his word—proceed with your work."

Vain evil-thinking of the evil-doer! Mr. Lumsden, in fear of the compulsory removal of the invalid, was writing to his sister to send up a chaise immediately from Portoran, and in a moment after, had despatched the most ungovernable of the lads to carry his note to the Manse.

Duncan Macalpine stood looking calmly at his cottage. His sister Jean, following his heroic example, had hurried into it, and now returned, leading a feeble woman of seventy—their mother. Duncan's wife stood beside her husband; two of his little boys lingered in childish wonder by the cottage door. The men began their odious work—the straw bands were cut, the heather thatch thrown in pieces on the ground. The children looked on at first in half-amused astonishment. They saw their home laid open to the sky with all its homely accommodations—their own little bed, their grandmother's chair by the fire, the basket of oatcakes on the table from which their "eleven-

hours piece" had been supplied. The eldest of them suddenly rushed forward in childish rage and vehemence, and springing upon the ladder, dealt a fruitless blow at one of the devastators. He was thrown off—a piece of the thatch struck upon his head—the child uttered a sharp cry and fell. His mother flew out from among the crowd. The Macalpines were shaken as with a wind, and with various cries of rage and grief were pressing forward again. Again Big Duncan stayed them. "Fuils that ye are, would ye lose your guid fame with your hames? would ye throw everything away? Be still, I tell you. Can I no guard my ain bairn mysel?"

The wave fell back: muttering in painful anger, the Macalpines obeyed the king-man among them, and restrained themselves. Big Duncan in his stern patience went forward. Before him, however, was a slight boyish figure, with uncovered head and long fair hair—the child was lifted in the youth's arms, "I will carry him—good woman, come with me—come away from this place, It is not right you should see it—come away."

"I thank ye, young gentleman," said Big

Duncan: "it becomes a young heart to shrink from the like of this, but we *maun* stay. Neither my wife nor me can leave the glen till we leave it with our haill people."

Giles Sympelton hurried on to the widow's cottage with the boy. The child was not much hurt—he was only stunned; and attended by his mother and aunt, he was taken into the house. Sympleton placed himself in front of the Macalpines by Mr. Lumsden's side.

The destruction went on—you could trace its progress by the agonized looks of these watching people. Now a sharp, sudden cry from some distressed mother, that bore witness the destroyers were throwing down the roof under which her little ones had been born. Now a long, low groan told the father's agony. The young men were shutting out the sight with their hands—they could not school themselves to patience; the little children, clinging about their feet, kept up a plaintive cry of shrill dismay and wonder, the chorus of that heart-breaking scene. House after house, unwindowed, roofless, and doorless, stood in mute desolation behind the hirelings of the unjust law, as their work went on. At last it was completed, and

they approached the widow's cottage again. There was an instant forgetfulness of individual suffering. Closely, side by side, the Macalpines surrounded the house of the widow. These strong men were dangerous opponents—even these excited women might be formidable to meet at such a time. The officers held back.

"I implore—I beseech!" cried Mr. Lumsden, "spare this house! Leave the sick youth within to die in peace. Leave us this one asylum for the aged and the feeble. If ye are men, spare the widow—spare the boy!"

"Fitz!" cried Giles Sympelton, in a tone of indignant appeal.

Mr. Whittret was enraged and furious.

"Lose no time, Simpson!" he cried. "It is three o'clock already. Make haste and finish!"

Big Duncan Macalpine stood undecided.

"It's a life!" he muttered. "It's lawful to defend a life, at any risk or hazard! Sir—Mr. Lumsden—what will we do?"

Mr. Lumsden made another appeal. It was useless. More peremptorily still the agent ordered the men to proceed.

"Duncan," said Mr. Lumsden, "for the sake of the Gospel you profess, and for your own

sake, let there be no resistance! Lift the boy out—protect him as you best can: we must leave the issue in God's hands. Brethren, give way to the officers. You can only bring further evil on yourselves. You cannot deliver the widow. Sirs, stand back till we are ready—we will give you space for your work then. The consequences be upon your own heads!"

The minister entered the cottage, and passed through among the patriarchs of the sorrowful community, who were sheltering from the chill March wind, under the only remaining roof in the glen. In a moment after he reappeared, bearing the sick lad, a helpless burden, in his strong arms. A cry rose from the women—the men clenched their fingers, and gnashed their teeth. The sharp, pale face raised itself above Mr. Lumsden's arm—the feeble invalid was strong with excitement.

"Be quiet, oh! be quiet—dinna do ill for my sake!"

"And now," cried Big Duncan, "I bid ye to my house—all of ye that are Macalpines. Leave the birds of prey to their work—come with me!"

The people obeyed. They formed themselves

into a solemn procession: the tremulous old man, whose years outnumbered a century, leaning upon two stalwart grandsons; the aged woman, Duncan Macalpine's mother, supported on her son's arm; strong men restraining by force which shook their vigorous frames the natural impulse to resistance; mothers, with compressed lips, shutting in the agony of their hearts—the train of weeping, bewildered children! The March wind swept keen and biting over them as they passed by their own desolate houses in stern silence, and assembled again, further up the glen. The work was accomplished. The last cottage in Oranmore was dismantled and roofless. The Macalpines were without a home!

CHAPTER VII.

"Virtuous households, though exceeding poor,
Pure livers were they all, austere and grave,
And fearing God—the very children taught
Stern self-respect—a reverence for God's Word;
And an habitual piety maintained
With strictness scarcely known on English ground."

WORDSWORTH.

GILES SYMPELTON ran from the glen. The lad was light of foot, and inspired with a worthy errand. Headlong, over burn, and ditch, and hedgerow he plunged on—past the long woods of Strathoran—past the gate where stood some of Lord Gillravidge's household, sheer on to the Tower. The door was open—he darted in—rushed up stairs—and in headlong haste plunged

into Mrs. Catherine's inner drawing-room. Mrs. Catherine herself was seated there alone. She looked up in wonder, as, with flushed face and disordered hair, and breathless from his precipitate speed, the lad suddenly presented himself before her.

"I want your carriage—I want you to send your carriage with me—for a dying lad—a sick boy who has no shelter. Give me your carriage!"

"Callant," said Mrs. Catherine, "what do you mean?" She rose and approached him. "Ye are the lad that was in temptation at Strathoran. Have ye seen the evil of your ways?"

"Your carriage—I want your carriage!" gasped poor Giles Sympelton. "Order it first, and I will tell you afterwards."

Mrs. Catherine did not hesitate. She rang the bell, and ordered the carriage immediately.

"Immediately—immediately!" cried the lad. "The cold may kill him."

"Sit down, callant," said Mrs. Catherine, "till it is ready; and tell me what has moved ye so greatly."

The youth wiped his hot forehead, and recovered his breath.

"The cottagers up the glen—their name is Macalpine—Lord Gillravidge has evicted them. There is not a house standing—they are all unroofed. The people have no shelter. And the lad—the dying lad!"

Mrs. Catherine rose. Amazement, grief, and burning anger contended in her face.

"What say ye, callant? The alien has dared to cast out the Macalpines of Oranmore from their ain land! I cannot believe it—it is not possible!"

"The lad is dying!" cried young Sympelton, too much absorbed with what he had seen to heed Mrs. Catherine's exclamation. "They are covering him with cloaks and plaids—they say the cold will kill him. It is a terrible sight!—old men, and women, and little children, and the dying lad! Not a roof in the whole glen to shelter them!"

Mrs. Catherine left the room, and went down stairs. An energetic word sent double speed into Andrew's movements as he prepared the carriage. Mrs. Euphan Morison was ordered to put wine into it; blankets and cloaks were added, and Mrs. Catherine, with her own hands, thrust Giles into the carriage.

"Bring the lad here, to the Tower; come back to me yourself. Bring the aged and feeble with ye, as many as can come. Mind that ye return to me your own self. And now, callant, away!"

The carriage dashed out of the court, and at a pace to which Mrs. Catherine's horses were not accustomed, took the way to Oranmore.

Fitzherbert and Whittret had left the glen, with their band of attendants. The Macalpines were alone; the shadows of the March evening began to gather darkly upon the hills. In Big Duncan's roofless cottage, on a bed, hastily constructed before the fire, and shielded with a rude canopy of plaids, lay the sick lad, shivering and moaning, as the gust of wind which swept through the vacant window-frame, and burst in wild freedom overhead, shook the frail shelter over him, and tossed the coverings off his emaciated limbs. Mr. Lumsden stood beside him. In the first shock of that great misfortune, the minister endeavoured to speak hopeful, cheering words—of earthly comfort yet to come—of heavenly strength and consolation, which no oppressing hand could bereave them of. Home-

less and destitute, in the stern silence of their restrained emotions, the Macalpines heard him; some vainly, the burning sense of personal wrong momentarily eclipsing even their religion; some with a noble patience which, had they been Romans of an older day, would have gained them the applauses of a world. These brief and lofty words of his were concluded with a prayer. The March evening was darkening, the wind sweeping chill and fierce above them. The tremulous old man leaned on the sick lad's bed; the grandmother crouched by the fire upon her grandchild's stool. Big Duncan Macalpine stood on his own threshold; without, close to the vacant window, stood the neighbours who could not find admission into the interior, and from the midst of them the voice of supplication ascended up to heaven, "For strength, for patience, for forgiveness to their enemy."

A consultation followed. Mr. Lumsden was looking out eagerly for the chaise from Portoran. It could not arrive in less than an hour, Big Duncan said; and the minister, with his own hands, endeavoured to fix up more securely a shelter for the suffering lad.

"What are we to do?" exclaimed one of the Macalpines. "Neighbours, what is to become of us?—where are we to gang?"

A loud scream from a young mother interrupted him; her infant was seized with the fearful cough and convulsive strugglings of croup. The poor young woman pressed it to her breast, and rushed to her own desolate cottage. Alas! what shelter was there? The roof lay in broken pieces on the ground; window and door were carried away; the fire had sunk into embers. She threw herself down before it, and tried to chafe the little limbs into warmth. Other mothers followed her. All the means known to their experience were adopted in vain. The terrible hoarse cough continued—the infant's face was already black.

"What are we to do?" exclaimed the same voice again. "Are we to see our bairns dee before our e'en? Duncan, we let them destroy our houses at your word! What are we to do?"

"If ye had dune onything else," said Big Duncan Macalpine, "we would have had the

roof o' a jail ower our heads before this time—and it's my hope there is nae faint heart among us, that would have left the wives and the bairns to fend for themsels. Neighbours, I kenna what to do; if we could but pit ower this night, some better hope might turn up for us."

His sister brushed past them as he spoke, carrying hot water to bathe the suffering infant —not hot enough, alas! to do it any good. The other women were heaping peats upon a fire, to make ready more; the old people within Duncan's house crouched and shivered by the narrow hearth; the little children clinging to the skirts of their parents, were sobbing with the cold.

"Pit ower the night?" said Roderick Macalpine, "we might do oursels on the hillside; but what's to come of them?" and he waved his hand towards the helpless circle by the fire —the aged, the dying, the children.

"Sirs," said the old man coming forward, fancying as it seemed that they appealed to him, "let us go to the kirkyard. Ye can pit up shelters there—no man can cast ye out of the

place where your forebears are sleeping. If they take a' the land beside, ye have yet a right to that."

The listeners shrank and trembled — the old man with his palsied head, and withered face, and wandering light blue eyes, proposing to them so ghastly a refuge. The Macalpines were not driven so utterly to extremity. It remained for these more enlightened days to send Highland cottars, in dire need, to seek a miserable shelter above the dust of their fathers.

The consultation was stayed—no one dared answer the old man—when suddenly Giles Sympelton was seen running in haste up the glen. He had brought the carriage as high as it could come, and now flew forward himself to get the invalid transferred to it. Big Duncan lifted the sick lad in his arms, and carried him away, while Giles lingered to deliver Mrs. Catherine's orders.

"Let me take the old people with me," he said, eagerly, to Mr. Lumsden. "The carriage is large—the old lady said I was to bring as many as could come. It is Mrs. Catherine Douglas, of the Tower—do not let us lose time,

Sir: get the oldest people down to the carriage."

The Macalpines did not cheer—they were too grave for that; but the lad's hand was grasped in various honest rough ones, and "blessings on him!" were murmured from many tongues. Three of the most feeble could be accommodated in the carriage—at least, could be crowded beneath its roof, while the sick youth was placed on the cushions, and his mother sat at his feet.

"Is there anything more I can do?" said Giles, looking in grief and pity upon the agonized face of the young mother, sitting within the dismantled cottage, waiting while her neighbours prepared another hot-bath for her child.

"Nothing," said Mr. Lumsden. "I thank you heartily, young gentleman, for what you have already done. You may have saved that poor lad's life by your promptitude. Tell Mrs. Catherine that every arrangement that can possibly be made for the comfort of the Macalpines, I will attend to. Good night—I thank you most sincerely. You will never repent this day's work, I am sure."

Giles lingered still.

"How is the child? will it die?" he asked anxiously of one of the women.

"Bless the innocent, the water's het this time," was the answer; "it's no rouping sae muckle. Eh, the Lord forbid it should die!"

Giles turned and ran down the glen, saw his charge safely deposited in the carriage, and, mounting beside the coachman, drove more leisurely to the Tower.

Before they had been very long away, the chaise arrived from Portoran. The infant's sufferings were abated; it had sunk into a troubled, exhausted sleep. Mr. Lumsden filled the chaise immediately with the feebler members of the houseless community. It was arranged that the rest should walk to Portoran—it was twelve miles—a weary length of way, where the minister pledged himself they should find accommodation. Big Duncan and Roderick Macalpine voluntarily remained in the glen, to protect the household goods of their banished people.

The chaise had driven off—the pedestrians were already on the high road. Duncan and Roderick, wrapped in their plaids, had seated themselves by the peat-fire in Duncan's roofless

dwelling. The stern composure upon the faces of these two men, lighted by the red glow of the fire, as they sat there in the rapidly darkening twilight, told a tale of the intense excitement of that day, and now of the gnawing sorrow, the weight of anxiety that possessed them. Mr. Lumsden stood at the door, his pony's bridle in his hand.

"Mind what I have said," he cried, as he left them. "Keep up your hearts and do not despair. You will not need to leave the country —you will find friends—only keep up your hearts and be strong. God will not forsake you."

They returned his good-night with deep emotion. This peaceful glen, that yesternight had slept beneath the moonbeams in the placid sleep of righteous and honourable labour—strange policy that could prefer some paltry gain to the continuance of the healthful home-joy of these true children, and heirs of the soil!

The two Macalpines sat together in silence, their eyes fixed on the red glow of the fire before them. By-and-by Roderick's gaze wandered—first to the numberless little domestic

tokens round, which spoke so pitiful a language —the basket of cakes was still on the table, the "big wheel" at which Jean Macalpine had been spinning so busily on the previous night, stood thrust aside in the corner. His eyes strayed further—through the vacant window-frame he saw, upon the other side of the Oran, his own roofless house; he saw the cradle from which his child had been hurriedly snatched, lying broken within; he saw the household seat in which, only some five winters since, he had placed bonnie Jeanie Macalpine, a bride then, the mother of three children now. His hearth was black—his house desolate—Jeanie and her children were outcasts upon the world. His heart failed him: "Oh, man! Duncan!" exclaimed poor Roderick, as he hid his face in his hands in an agony of grief.

Big Duncan Macalpine's dark eyes were dilated with the stern and passionate force of his strong resolution; his clear, brave, honest face was turned steadfastly towards the fire.

"Roderick," he said, emphatically, "I daurna trust mysel to look about me. Keep your e'en away from the ruined houses—look forward,

man. Have I no my ain share? is my house less desolate than yours?"

In the meantime, Giles Sympelton had arrived with his charge at the Tower; and having seen the sick youth placed in a warm room, with kindly hands about him, and the old people settled comfortably by the great kitchen fire, was finally solacing himself after the labours of this strangely exciting day, at Mrs. Catherine's well-appointed dinner-table, with Mrs. Catherine herself opposite him. She was singularly kind. In spite of much temptation, and many bad associates, Giles Sympleton had remained unsophisticated and simple. The fear of ridicule, which might in other circumstances have induced him to resist the attractions of this stately old lady, with whom he had been brought so strangely in contact, was removed from the lad now—he gave way to the fascination. With natural *naïveté* and simplicity, he told her his whole brief history; how of late he had written very seldom to his father; how he had become disgusted with Fitzherbert, and disliked Gillravidge, and was so very sorry for "poor Sutherland;" how

he vowed never to enter Lord Gillravidge's house again, if "that noble fellow, Macalpine," were turned out of his; and, finally, how determined was he to keep his vow—to send for his servant, and his possessions, and to go into Portoran that very night: he was resolved not to spend another night in Strathoran.

"I have houseroom for ye, callant," said Mrs. Catherine. "Let your servant bring your apparel here—I am not scrimpit for chambers. Ye have done leal service to the Macalpines, as becomes a young heart. I will be blyth of ye in my house. Ye should send for your man without delay."

The youth hesitated—met Mrs. Catherine's eye — blushed — looked down, and muttered something about troubling her.

"Ye will be no trouble to me—I have told ye that. What is your name, callant?"

Sympelton looked up surprised and bashful.

"Giles Sympelton," he said.

"Sympelton?" said Mrs. Catherine. "Callant, was the bairn that died in Madeira thirty years ago, a friend to you?"

"My father had a sister," said young Sym-

pelton; "he was very fond of her—who died very long ago, years before I was born."

Mrs. Catherine was silent, and seemed much moved.

"Callant!" she said, "I had one brother who was the very light of my e'en, and there was a gentle blue-eyed bairn, in yon far away island, who went down with him to the grave. The name of her was Helen. He died in the morning, and she died at night, and on the same day her brother and me buried our dead. If ye are of her blood, ye are doubly welcome!"

"My aunt's name was Helen," said Giles, "and she was only fifteen when she died. I have heard my father speak of her often."

Mrs. Catherine was so long silent after that, that the young man began to feel constrained and uneasy, and to think that, after all, he had better try the accommodation of the 'Sutherland Arms' in Portoran. All the circumstances of Mrs. Catherine's great grief were brought vividly before her by his name. Helen Sympelton!—how well she remembered the attenuated child-woman, maturing brilliantly

under the deadly hand of that consumptive hectic, who had accompanied Sholto to the grave.

She spoke at last with an effort:

"I have some country neighbours coming to me this night. Ye may not be caring for meeting them: therefore do not come up the stair, unless ye like. Andrew will let you see your room, and ye will find sundry pleasant books in my library; and, till your man comes, Andrew will wait your orders."

Giles intimated his perfect satisfaction in the prospect of meeting Mrs. Catherine's country neighbours; and after some further kindly words, and a beaming sunshiny smile, the old lady left the room.

Mr. Lumsden also had by this time received, and provided accommodation for, his share of the ejected Macalpines. The families of Roderick and Duncan were in his own hospitable Manse. Some of the others had been received, in their way down, into the farm-house of Whiteford. Duncan Roy had stopped to pour his story, in indignant Celtic vehemence, into the ears of Mr. Fergusson, and, with his pretty sister, Flora, had been taken into Woodsmuir. The

others were provided for in various houses in Portoran—the most of them in genuine neighbourly sympathy and compassion, and some for the hire which Mr. Lumsden offered, when other motives were wanting. They were all settled, in comparative comfort at last; all but those two stern watching men, who sat through the gloom of the wild March night, within the roofless walls of Big Duncan's house, watching the humble possessions of the Macalpines of Oranmore.

His manifold labours over, Mr. Lumsden took a hurried dinner, and proceeded to dress. He had been invited to the Tower, to Mrs. Catherine's quiet evening gathering of country neighbours. His sister endeavoured to dissuade him, on the ground of his fatigue. Mr. Lumsden laughed—he always did laugh when fatigue was mentioned. Then it was absolutely necessary that he should see how poor Kenneth Macalpine had borne his removal: and then—probably Mr. Lumsden had some additional inducement, private to himself, which we cannot exactly condescend upon.

Miss Lumsden excused herself from accompanying him. Her brother had done his part

for the poor Macalpines—it was her turn now. The gray pony too was not quite so invulnerable as its master. It owned to the fatigue of the day, in a very decided disinclination to leave its comfortable stable, so Mr. Lumsden took his seat beside Walter Foreman in the gig, and proceeded to the Tower.

It was not unusual for Mrs. Catherine to have these gatherings. They were very simple affairs. She liked to bring the young people together; she liked herself, now and then, to have a pleasant domestic chat with the elders. Everybody liked those quiet and easy parties, to which the guests came in their ordinary dress, and enjoyed themselves after their own fashion, without restraint or ceremony; and everybody, who had the good fortune to be on Mrs. Catherine's list of favourites, had most pleasant recollections of the ruddy inner drawing-room, at these especial times.

Giles Sympelton paid another visit to poor Kenneth Macalpine after dinner. He found him sleeping pleasantly in the warm, cheerful, light apartment, his mother watching with tearful joy by his bedside, and Mrs. Euphan Morison sitting in portly state by the fire.

Widow Macalpine whispered thanks and blessings, and added, that, "he hadna sleeped sae quiet, since ever they were warned out o' the glen." Giles withdrew with very pleasant feelings, and walking up to the room prepared for him, where his servant already waited, proceeded to dress.

This important operation was performed very carefully, some dreamy idea of "astonishing the natives" floating through his boyish brain the while. Giles, simple lad as he was, was yet a gentleman—he had no flashy finery about him—his dress was perfectly plain and simple. He was satisfied, however, and felt he would make an impression.

Ada Mina Coulter's pretty, girlish face was the first he noticed on entering the room. He did make an impression. Ada knew very pleasantly, as she drooped her brown curls before the glance of the stranger, that the blue eyes from whence that glance came, belonged to a lord's son—an Honourable Giles.

Mrs. Catherine introduced him, with kindly mention of his day's labour, to her elder friends—to Lewis Ross and Anne—and then committing him to their charge, returned to her conversation

with the fathers and mothers. Giles by no means made the impression he expected on that party—he had a feeling of old friendship for Anne—a slight idea of rivalry in respect to Lewis—but consoled himself pleasantly half an hour after, by Ada Coulter's side, putting her into a very agreeable state of flutter and tremulousness. Ada was younger than Alice Aytoun —was but a little way past her sixteenth birthday indeed, and was not yet accustomed to the homage of young gentlemen—and an Honourable Giles!

There was great indignation concerning the ejection of the Macalpines, and as soon as it was known that Giles had been present, a little crowd gathered round him. He told the story with great feeling; described Big Duncan Macalpine's conduct with enthusiasm; touched slightly on his own fears for poor Kenneth; and laughed when he told them of his race. Mrs. Catherine drew near at that point of the story, and extending her hand over Ada's curls, patted him kindly on the head. The Honourable Giles felt rather indignant—it was making a child of him. No matter—Ada Coulter thought him a hero.

A graver group were discussing the subject at the other end of the room. Mr. Lumsden told the story there. Mr. Coulter and Mr. Fergusson were bending forward to him with anxious faces. The ladies were no less interested. Anne Ross leant on the sofa at Mrs. Coulter's elbow. Marjory Falconer stood apart, with her hand upon the back of a chair, and her strong and expressive face swept by whirlwinds—indignation, grief, sympathy—all mellowed, however, by a singular shade of something that looked very like proud and affectionate admiration—of whom was Marjory Falconer proud?

"Now, gentlemen," said Mr. Lumsden, "you must assist me. I have set my heart upon it, Mr. Coulter, that these families shall not be sent penniless to Canada. I don't like emigration at all, but in this case it would be nothing less than banishment—what can we do for them?"

Mr. Coulter took a pinch of snuff.

"It is not a bad thing emigration, Mr. Lumsden; if there was no emigration, what would become of these vast waste lands? I suppose we might pour our whole population into the backwoods, and there would still be

unreclaimed districts. Depend upon it, Sir, it comes very near a sin to let land, that should be bringing forth seed and bread, lie waste and desolate, when there are men to work it."

"Well," said Mr. Lumsden, "we won't argue about that. It may be right enough—I only say I don't like emigration; and we have abundance of waste lands at home, Mr. Coulter; but in the case of the Macalpines, it could bear no aspect but banishment. I believe they would almost starve first. What can we do for them?"

There was a pause of consideration.

"Robert," said Mrs. Fergusson.

Her husband looked round.

"When you commence your improvements, you will require many labourers—would not the Macalpines do? We were thinking of taking Flora to be one of our maids at Woodsmuir, you know—other people, no doubt, would do the same. What do you think?"

Mr. Fergusson spent a moment in deliberation; then he looked up to Mr. Coulter inquiringly.

"Not a bad idea," said the agriculturist.

"I was thinking of that myself," said Mr.

Fergusson. "There is not a very great number of them: we shall surely be able to keep them in the district; and there is always the hope," the good factor endeavoured to look very sanguine and cheerful—"there is always the hope of Mr. Archibald's return."

No one made any response; saving himself and Mrs. Catherine, no one was sanguine on that subject: they were very glad to join in good wishes for the broken laird; but saw all the improbabilities in a stronger light than his more solicitous friends could do.

"If he does," said Mr. Lumsden, "if he ever can redeem the estate again, I suppose the Macalpines are safe."

Mr. Fergusson looked with gratitude at the minister. It was pleasant to have his hope homologated even so slightly. "Safe? ay, without doubt or fear! there is not a kinder heart in all Scotland. How many men will there be, Mr. Lumsden? how many able men?"

Mr. Lumsden entered into a calculation. We need not follow him through the list of Duncans and Donalds and Rodericks; there were eleven fathers of families. Duncan Roy

and his sister Flora were orphans; besides, there were six or seven young men, and a plentiful undergrowth of boys of all ages and sizes.

"Say sixteen men," said Mr. Fergusson, "the rest could be herds, or—there is always work for these halflin lads. What do you say, Mr. Coulter?"

Mr. Coulter's deliverance was favourable. Mrs. Catherine had urgent need of a ploughman, she suddenly discovered. Mrs. Coulter thought she "could do with" another maid. The Macalpines were in a fair way of being settled.

"Mind what I say," said Mrs. Catherine, "its only for a time. They shall recover their ancient holdings, every inch of them; their right to the land is as good as Archie's; the clansman holds it on as clear a title as the chief. Mind, I put this in the bargain; that whenever the estate returns to its rightful owner, the Macalpines return to Oranmore."

Mr. Fergusson's eyes glistened. He seemed to be looking forward to some apocryphal future gladness, which he dared hardly venture to believe in, yet to which his heart could not

choose but cling. God speed the adventurer in the new world!

Mr. Lumsden proceeded down stairs immediately, to visit the aged and sick who had been brought to the Tower: in a short time he returned. The guests young and old were more amalgamated than before; they were sitting in a wide circle round Mrs. Catherine's chair. They did not perceive the minister's entrance: for some reason known to himself he stepped behind the window-curtain. He was looking out upon the clear, cold, starry night.

"Bless me," said Mrs. Bairnsfather, "Mr. Lumsden is in high favour with us all. It's a wonder a fine young man like him has not got a wife yet."

Marjory Falconer looked thundery; she had been aware of a private telegraphic sign made by the hand of a certain tall dark figure, which was looking out upon the night.

"All in good time," said Mrs. Coulter, "he is but a young man yet."

"How old would you say?" inquired Mrs. Bairnsfather.

"Oh! one or two and thirty perhaps—not more."

"Not more!" Mrs. Bairnsfather had a vindictive recollection of sundry invasions of her husband's parish. "I'll warrant him a good five years older than that."

"Well, well," said the good-humoured agriculturist. "He is not too old to be married yet, that is a consolation."

"What would you say to Miss Ada Mina?" continued Mrs. Bairnsfather. "Miss Jeanie, I suppose, I must not speak of now."

Ada Coulter shook her curls indignantly. She, full sixteen, and receiving the homage of an Honourable Giles, to be "scorned" with a minister of five and thirty!

"Or Miss Ross?" said the mischief-making Mrs. Bairnsfather. "They would make an excellent couple, I am sure."

"I won't have that," said Lewis. "I have engaged Anne, Mrs. Bairnsfather; if she does not take my man, I'll disown her."

"Anne, I want you," said Marjory Falconer: "come here."

"Or Miss Falconer herself?" said the indefatigable Mrs. Bairnsfather turning sharp round, and directing the attention of all and sundry to Marjory's face, perfectly scorching as it was,

with one of her overwhelming, passionate blushes, "and that would secure the contrast which people say is best for peace and happiness."

Miss Falconer tried to laugh—the emphasis on the word *peace* had not escaped her; she slid her arm through Anne's, and left the room. The dark figure behind the curtain, followed her with his eye; laughed within himself a mighty secret laugh, and came out of his concealment, to the immense discomfiture of Mrs. Bairnsfather, and the great mirth of Giles and Ada.

"That abominable woman!" exclaimed Marjory, as they went down stairs.

"Hush," said Anne, "she is the minister's wife."

"The minister's wife! there is never any peace where *she* is. She is a pretty person to think she can understand—"

"Who, Marjory?"

"Oh," said Marjory, with a less vehement blush, "it's because John Lumsden is so popular in Strathoran—you know that. Come, let us go and see Kenneth Macalpine."

They did go; poor Kenneth was feverish and

unable for any further excitement, so they spoke a few kindly encouraging words to his mother, and left the room. Mrs. Euphan Morison had retreated to her own apartment, and sat there by the fire sulky and dignified—the doctor had absolutely forbidden her administering to the invalid a favourite preparation of her own, which she was sure would cure him.

Marjory and Anne turned to the great, warm, shining kitchen. The patriarch of Oranmore was dozing in a chair by the fire—the old man's mind was unsettled; he had returned to his native Gaelic, and had been speaking in wandering and incoherent sentences of the churchyard, and the right they had to the graves of their fathers. An aged woman, the grand-aunt of Duncan Roy and Flora, who had brought up the orphans, sat opposite to him, muttering and wringing her withered hands in pain. She had been long afflicted with rheumatism, and the exposure made her aged limbs entirely useless. She had to be lifted into her chair—and aggravating her bodily pain was the anguish of her mind: "The bairns—the bairns! what will become of the bairns?"

The other Macalpine was a feeble woman,

widowed and childless, to whom her honourable and kindly kindred had made up, so far as temporal matters went, the loss of husband and of children. She was rocking herself to and fro, and uttering now and then a low unconscious cry, as she brooded over the ruin of her friends, and her own helpless beggary. The firmament was utterly black for her—she had no strength, no hope.

Marjory and Anne lingered for some time, endeavouring to cheer and comfort these two helpless women. Mrs. Catherine's maids, carefully superintended by Jacky, had done everything they could to make them comfortable; and before the young ladies left the kitchen, Flora Macalpine had entered, and was at her aunt's side, telling of the reception Duncan and herself had met with at Woodsmuir, and how Mrs. Fergusson had half promised to take her into the nursery to be "bairn's-maid" to the little Fergussons. The old woman was a little comforted—very little; for if Flora was away in service, who could take care of her painful, declining years?

Jacky followed Anne and Marjory out of the kitchen. They were absorbed with this matter

of the ejectment, and so did not observe her. Marjory drew her companion to the library.

"Do come in here, Anne. I don't want to go up stairs yet."

They went in, Jacky following—she seemed determined not to lose the opportunity.

"If ye please, Miss Anne—"

"Well, Jacky?"

Jacky hesitated—she did not know how to go on, so she repeated: "If ye please, Miss Anne—" and stopped again.

"What is it, Jacky?" said Anne, "tell me."

"If ye please, will ye let me go with ye, Miss Anne?" said Jacky, in a burst. "I ken how to—to behave mysel, and to attend to a lady, and I'll never give ye ony trouble, and I'll do whatever I'm bidden. Oh, Miss Anne, will ye let me go?"

"What has put that into your head, Jacky?" exclaimed Anne.

Jacky could not tell what had put it into her head, inasmuch as any explanation might have shown Anne that the singular elf before her had, by some intuition peculiar to herself, made very tolerable progress in the study of those

important matters, which of late had occupied so much of their thoughts, and hopes, and consultations in Merkland and the Tower: so she merely repeated:

"Oh, if ye please, Miss Anne, will ye let me go?"

Anne was somewhat puzzled.

"You are too young to be my maid, Jacky," she said.

"Oh, if ye please, Miss Anne, I ken how to do—and I'm no idle when there's ony purpose for't—and I aye do what I'm bidden, except—" Jacky hung her head, "except whiles."

"But Anne wants a great big woman, like me, Jacky," said Marjory Falconer, laughing, "an old woman perhaps."

"But if ye please, Miss Falconer," said Jacky, seriously, "an old woman wouldna do—an old woman wouldna be so faithful and—and—" Jacky paused, her conscience smiting her: was not the Squire of the redoubtable Britomart an old woman? Whereupon there ensued in Jacky's mind a metaphysical discussion as to whether Glaucé or Mrs. Elspat Henderson was the best type of the class of ancient serving-women—remaining undecided

upon which point, she had nothing for it but to repeat the prayer of her petition: "Oh, Miss Anne, will ye let me go?"

"Do you intend to take a maid with you, Anne?" asked Marjory.

"Yes."

"Then you should take Jacky by all means."

Anne hesitated.

"You forget, Jacky, that it is not I, but Mrs. Catherine, who must decide this."

"Oh, if ye please, Mrs. Catherine will let me go, Miss Anne, if you're wanting me."

"And your mother, Jacky?"

"My mother's no needing me, Miss Anne."

"Well, we will see about it," said Anne, smiling; "as you seem to have quite made up your mind, and decided on the matter. I will speak to Mrs. Catherine, Jacky. We shall see."

Jacky made an uncouth courtesy and vanished.

"Is it Edinburgh you are going to, Anne?" said Marjory, shooting a keen glance upon her friend's face.

"I shall be in Edinburgh," said Anne, evasively.

"Why, Anne!" exclaimed Marjory, "must one not even know where you are going? What is this secret journey of yours?"

"It is no secret journey, Marjory. I am going farther east than Edinburgh — to the sea-side."

"To the sea-side!" Marjory looked amazed. "You are not delicate, Anne Ross. What are you going to do at the sea-side?"

"Nothing," said Anne.

"Nothing! You have not any friends there —you are going away quite by yourself! Is anything the matter, Anne? Tell me what you are going to do."

"I would tell you very gladly, Marjory, if I could. My errand is quite a private one: when it is accomplished, you shall hear it all."

The blood rushed in torrents to Marjory Falconer's face.

"You cannot trust me!" she exclaimed. "Anne, I do not care for Mrs. Bairnsfather's petty insults. I have been too careless of forms, perhaps—perhaps I have made people think me rude and wild, when I was only striving to reach a better atmosphere than they

had placed me in—but you, Anne Ross—you to shrink from me—you to think me unworthy of confidence!"

"Hush—hush, Marjory," said Anne, "Pray do not begin to be suspicious—it does not become you at all. I had a brother once, Marjory—as people say, a most generous, kind, good brother—whose name lies under the blot of a great crime. He was innocent—but the world believed him guilty. I am going to try—by what quiet and humble means are in my power—to remove this undeserved stain. If I succeed, I shall have a very moving story to tell you: if I do not succeed, let us never speak of it again. In any case, I know you will keep my secret."

Marjory pressed her friend's hand, and did not speak. She remembered dimly having heard of some great sorrow connected with Mr. Ross's (of Merkland) death, and was ashamed and grieved now, that she had pressed her inquiries so far. Marjory Falconer, like Lewis Ross, was learning lessons: the rapidly developing womanhood, which sent those vehement flushes to her cheek, and overpowered

her sometimes with agonies of shame, was day by day asserting itself more completely. A few more paroxysms, and it would have gained the victory.

CHAPTER VIII.

"We know it not, amid the bustling din
And vulgar life of cities—the dear love
That clings to this hereditary home
Among the solemn hills—the noble hills—
Most ancient dwellers of the soil—most true
Of all hereditary friends."

By the beginning of April, the Macalpines were finally settled; the majority of them being employed as labourers on Mr. Fergusson's farms of Loelyin and Lochend. Roderick and his family occupied a cottage in the vicinity of the Tower. He was engaged as ploughman by Mrs. Catherine Douglas. Big Duncan remained with his people—their houses were now far apart—they were restless and ill

at ease, feeling their dispersion as the Jews of old felt their captivity. These clinging local attachments are comparatively little known to people confined within the limits of cities, and living in the hired houses, which any caprice or revolution of fortune may make them change. It is not so with the "dwellers of the hills," the whole circuit of whose simple lives for generations have passed under one roof; to whom the sun has risen and set behind the same majestic hills in daily glory, and whose native streamlet has a household tongue, as familiar as the more articulate one of nearest kindred. A hope had sprung up in the breast of the Macalpines—a hope to which their yearning home-love gave vivid strength and power. Their chief would return: he would come back in renewed wealth and prosperity: he would lead them back to their own homes in triumph. This anticipation enlivened the sad pilgrimages, which the banished hillfolk made on those dewy spring evenings to their beloved glen. It needed some such hope to stifle the indignant grief and anger, which might have else blazed up in illegal vehemence, when the ejected Macalpines, in little parties of two and three, returned to Oranmore, to look

upon their former homes, now desolate and blackened, with grass springing up on each household floor, and waving already from the broken walls—but they looked away, where, far over the wide-spreading low-country, there shone in the distance, the glimmer of the great sea; and prayed, in the fervour of their hope and yearning, for the home-coming of their chief. God speed the adventurer, landing even now on the sunny shores of the new world! How many hearts beat high with prayers and hopes for his return!

The sick lad, Kenneth, did not die: he lived to hold the name of the youthful Giles Sympelton in dearest honour and reverence, and to do him leal service in an after-time. Giles, with some reluctance, left the Tower, after a week's residence there, to join his father—leaving Ada Coulter with the first sadness upon her, which she had experienced since her happy release from school.

In the middle of April, Anne set out upon her journey. With Mrs. Catherine's full consent, Jacky was to accompany her. Anne's departure excited some attention. There seemed to be a vague conception among the neighbours,

that something of moment was concealed under this quiet visit to the south, of the very quiet Miss Ross, of Merkland. Jeanie Coulter wondered if she was going to be married. Mrs. Coulter endeavoured to recollect if she had ever heard of the Rosses having relations in that quarter. Mr. Foreman said nothing, but, with that keen lawyer eye of his, darted into the secret errand at once, and already sympathized with the failure and disappointment, which he felt sure would follow.

Anne's farewells were over—all but one—the day before leaving Merkland, she went up to the mill to say good-by to little Lilie. She found Mrs. Melder in ecstasies of wonder and admiration, holding up her hands, and crying, "Bless me!" as she unfolded one by one the contents of a box which stood upon the table. They consisted of little garments beautifully made—a profusion of them. Lilie herself was luxuriating over a splendid picture-book, after viewing with a burst of childish delight the pretty little silk frock which Mrs. Melder, in the pride of her heart, was already thinking would make so great a sensation when it appeared first in their seat in the front gallery

(*alias* the mid loft) of Portoran kirk. Nothing less than a mother's hand could have packed that wonderful box; its gay little muslin frocks, which Mrs. Melder "had never seen the like of, for fineness," its inner garments of beautiful linen, its bright silken sashes, its story books, resplendent in their gilded bindings, its parcels of sweetmeats and toys. Mrs. Melder was overwhelmed—the grandeur and wealth of her little charge fairly took away her breath.

"And now when she's won to an easier speech, Miss Anne," said the good woman aside. "She ca's me nurse—what think ye! it's a wonderful bairn—and ye'll hear her say lang words sometimes, that I'm sure she never learned frae me; it's my thought, Miss Anne, that the bairn kent the English tongue afore she came here, and had either forgotten't, or—atweel ane disna ken what to think; but this while she's ta'en to speaking about her mamma. It's a wonder to me that ony mother could hae the heart to part wi' her."

"See," cried Lilie, springing to Anne's side, "look what bonnie things," and she precipitated a shoal of little books upon Anne's knee.

"They are very pretty, Lilie," said Anne. "Who sent you all these?"

The child looked at her gravely. "It would be mamma—it was sure to be mamma."

"Where is mamma?" asked Anne.

"Far away yonder—over the big water—but she aye minds Lilie."

"And why did you come away from mamma, Lilie?" said Anne.

The child began to cry. "Lilie ill, ill—like to die. Oh! if you had seen my mamma greeting." And throwing herself down on the ground, Lilie fell into one of her passionate bursts of grief.

"But yon wasna your mamma that brought ye here, my lamb?" said Mrs. Melder.

Lilie continued to weep—too bitterly to give any answer.

Anne turned over the books—in the blank leaf of one of them a name was written in a boyish hand—"Lilia Santa Clara." By-and-by the child's grief moderated, and, taking up her books again, she ran to the mill to show them to Robert.

"Lilia Santa Clara," it gave no clue to the child's origin.

"Haill three names!" said Mrs. Melder, "if ane only kent what her father's name was; the leddy that brought her here said only 'Lilias,' and I dinna mind if I askit the last ane in my flutter—and bonnie outlandish names they are; 'Lilia Santa Clara'—to think of a wean wi' a' thae grand names putting Melder at the hinder end!—it's out of the question."

"Santa Clara may be the surname, Mrs. Melder," said Anne, smiling at the conjunction.

"Eh! think ye so, Miss Anne? I never heard of folk having first names for their surname; though to be sure they do ca' the English flunky that has the confectionary shop in Portoran, Thomas. Weel, it may be sae."

"Does she call herself by this name?" asked Anne.

"Ay, ou ay, I have heard the words mony a time; and sae far as I can guess, Miss Anne, she maun hae been sent to yon lady frae some foreign pairt. Eh, bless me! there maun be some shame and reproach past the common, afore they sent away a bairn like yon."

Jacky Morison was in a state of intense and

still excitement—the fire had reached a white heat before they left Merkland. Barbara Genty, Mrs. Ross's favoured maid, cast envious looks at her as she sat perched in the back seat of the gig, which was to convey them to Portoran. Old Esther Fleming, who stood without the gate to watch Miss Anne's departure, regarded Jacky dubiously, as if doubting her fitness for her important post. Jacky rose heroically to the emergency. Her faithfulness, her discretion, her true and loyal service, should be beyond all question when they returned.

From her earliest recollection, Anne Ross had been Jacky's pattern and presiding excellence, less awful and nearer herself than Mrs. Catherine—and of all kinds of disinterested and unselfish devotion, there are few so chivalrous as the enthusiastic and loving service of a girl, to the grown woman who condescends to notice and protect her.

When the coach arrived in Edinburgh, Anne saw from its window little Alice Aytoun's fair face looking for her anxiously. James and Alice were waiting to take her home. Anne had purposed spending the short time she should remain in Edinburgh, in the house of an old companion

and former schoolfellow; but Alice clung and pleaded, there was no denying her—so Anne suffered herself to be guided to Mrs. Aytoun's quiet little house.

Mrs. Aytoun received her with grave kindness; the affectionate dependence which Alice had upon the stronger character of Anne, the good report which James had given of her, and even her present undertaking, out of the way and unusual though it was, had prepossessed Mrs. Aytoun in her favour. And Norman—the neglected wife remembered him too, so delicately kind, so generous, so reverent of her weakness long ago, when her husband and he were friends; and though she delivered no judgment in his favour, her heart yet went forth in full sympathy with the brave sister, who was so resolute in her belief of his innocence, so eager to labour for its proof. Mrs. Aytoun's God-speed was music to the heart of Anne.

And Alice, very tremulously joyful, clung about her all night long—now sitting on the stool at her feet, her fair curls drooping on Anne's knee—now leaning on her chair—now seated by her side, clasping her hand. James,

too, with brotherly confidence and kindness, advised with her about her plans and future proceedings. Anne felt the atmosphere brighten. Surely these were good omens.

In the meantime, Jacky, we regret to say, had been suffering a good deal from disappointment; it was not from her first glimpse of Edinburgh, but it was from the house in Edinburgh, which was specially honoured as being the dwelling of "Miss Alice." Jacky had been struck with awe and admiration as she glanced at it from without. The great "land" looked very stately, and spacious, and commanding, though it did immediately front a street, and had neither grounds nor trees surrounding it—but when the immense house dwindled into a single flat, of which she could count all the rooms at a glance, Jacky felt the disappointment sadly. Then she was taken into the small bright kitchen, where Mrs. Aytoun's stout woman-servant, the only domestic of the household, was preparing tea for the travellers. Jacky was scarcely prepared for this. It might have been difficult, we fancy, for many persons more experienced than Jacky, to ascertain what claim to respect or honour, a young Scottish lawyer,

with very little practice as yet, whose house consisted of one flat only, and the wants of whose establishment one woman-servant could supply—could possibly have.

But James Aytoun had not only an excellent claim to respect and honour, but actually received it. It was not any empty pride either which led him to sign himself James Aytoun, of Aytoun. Had it not been for the reckless and extravagant father, whose debts had so hopelessly entangled his inheritance, the territorial designation would have represented many fair acres—a long-descended patrimony. As it was, with only a desolate mansion-house, in a southern county, and some bleak lands about it, James Aytoun, of Aytoun, was still received and honoured as a gentleman of good family and blood—neither by descent, education, nor breeding beneath any family in Scotland.

It is but a narrow spirit which endeavours to sneer at a distinction like this, and call it the pride of poverty. James Aytoun belonged to that well-nurtured, manly class, whose hereditary honour and good fame belong to the nation, and whose frank dignity of mind and tone are as far removed as mental loftiness can be from that

vulgar and arrogant thing, which mean men call pride.

Jacky was reconciling herself to the little Edinburgh kitchen, and had already entered into conversation with Tibbie, when little Bessie arrived from her mother's humble house in an adjacent back street, to renew her acquaintance with her Strathoran friend. Jacky had many messages to deliver from Johnnie Halflin, which Bessie received with a due amount of blushing laughter.

"And, Oh, Jacky! how will they ever do wanting you at the Tower?"

Jacky did not apprehend the covert wit—did not even perceive that the rosy little Edinburgh-bred girl, was about to condescend to, and patronise, the awkward rustic one.

"They'll only miss me, for a while, at first—and then, maybe, we'll no be long."

"Is't Miss Ross that's with you?" asked Bessie.

"I'm with Miss Ross," said Jacky, quickly. "Miss Anne chose me of her own will—after I askit her—and so did Miss Falconer."

"Eh! isna she an awfu' funny lady, yon Miss Falconer?"

"Funny!" Jacky was indignantly astonished. "I dinna ken what ye ca' funny, Bessie. She's like—"

"She's no like ither folk," said Bessie.

"It's you that doesna ken. She's like—"

"Wha is she like, Jacky?"

"She's like Belphœbe," muttered Jacky, hastily. "But ye dinna ken wha *she* was—and she's a lady, for a' that she does strange thing whiles."

"Is that the lady that throosh the gentleman that was gaun to be uncivil to our Miss Alice?" interposed Tibbie.

"Yes," said Bessie, laughing. Little Bessie was not above the vanity of being thought to know these north country magnates. "And on New-year's night, when all the ladies were at the Tower, (ye mind, Jacky?) Miss Falconer gied me a shilling a' to mysel, for bringing her napkin to her, that she had left in Miss Alice's dressing-room—and nippit my lug, and tell't me to take care o' Miss Alice—she ca'ed her my little mistress. Isna she an awful height herself?"

"She's no so tall as Mrs. Catherine," said Jacky.

"Eh, Jacky! Miss Alice didna come up to her shouther, and she's a haill head higher than Miss Ross."

Jacky did not choose to answer: though why there should seem any slight to Marjory, in an exaggeration of her stature, we cannot tell. Without doubt, Belphœbe was to the full as tall as she.

"Do you ken that Merkland's been in Edinburgh?" asked Bessie. In Strathoran she had called Lewis, Mr. Ross; now she was bent on impressing Tibbie with a deep sense of her own familiarity with these great people. "Eh, Jacky, do you mind what Johnnie Halflin used to say about Merkland?"

Jacky had a high sense of honour. She made an elfin face at her talkative companion, and remained prudently silent.

"What did he say?" asked Tibbie.

"Ou naithing. Jacky and me kens."

"An he said onything ill, I redd him to keep out o' the power o' my ten talents. He's a young blackguard, like the maist feck of his kind, I'll warrant—idle serving callants, wi' nought to do in this world, but claver about their betters, wi' light-headed gilpies, like

yoursel. I wad just like to ken what he said!"

"It was naething ill," said Jacky.

"Oh, he'll be a lad to some o' ye, nae doubt —set ye up! But I can tell ye, he had better no come here to say an ill word o' young Mr. Ross."

"Miss Anne's Mr. Lewis's sister," said Jacky, decisively. "Johnnie dauredna say a word ill o' him—only that he was—"

Bessie laughed — *she* had no honourable scruples, but maliciously refrained from helping Jacky out.

"Only about Miss Alice and him."

"Weel, ye're a queer lassie," said Mrs. Aytoun's maid. "Could ye no have tell't me that at first?"

Bessie laughed again.

"And, Jacky, is the wee fairy lady aye at the Mill yet?"

"Wha's that?" cried the curious Tibbie.

"Oh, it's a wee bairn that the fairies sent to Strathoran. She was a' dressed in green silk, and had wings like Miss Alice's white veil, and was riding on a pony as white as snaw; and the miller's wife took her in, and her wings

took lowe at the fire, and she would have been a' burned, if Miss Ross hadna saved her—and Johnnie Halflin saw her wi' his ain e'en—and they say she's some kin to Jacky."

Jacky repelled the insult with immense disdain.

"If I had Johnnie Halflin here, I would douk him in the Oran."

"Ye might douk him in the water o' Leith, Jacky," said Bessie, laughing; "but the Oran's no here, mind."

Jacky was indignantly silent.

"And wha is she?" inquired Tibbie.

"She's a little girl," said Jacky, with some dignity, "a very bonnie wee foreign lady; and Mrs. Melder keeps her at the Mill, and she speaks in a strange tongue, and sings sangs—low, sweet, floating sangs—ye never heard the like of them, and her name is Lilie."

"Lilie what?"

"I dinna ken. She says her name is Lilia Santa Clara, but naebody kens whether that's her last name or no."

"Losh!" exclaimed Tibbie, "will she be canny, after a'?"

"Canny!—you should look nearer yoursel," said Bessie, with laughing malice.

"Never heed her," said Tibbie. "Sit into the table, and take your tea. She's a light-headed fuil—and ye can tell Johnnie Halflin that frae me."

"Is Miss Anne gaun to bide in Edinburgh?" inquired Bessie, as they seated themselves at Tibbie's clean, small table.

"No—she's gaun to the sea-side."

"Eh, Jacky, where? we'll come out and see ye."

"I dinna mind the name of the place," said Jacky, "but it's on the sea-side."

"And what's Miss Anne gaun to do?"

Jacky paused to deliberate. "She's no gaun to do onything. She's just gaun to please hersel."

"Ay," said the inquisitive Bessie, "but what is't for?"

"It's maybe for something good," said Jacky, quickly, "for that's aye Miss Anne's way; but she wasna gaun to tell me."

"But what do you *think* it is, Jacky?" persisted Bessie, "ane can aye gie a guess—is she gaun to be married?"

"No!" exclaimed Jacky, indignantly. "Married! It's because ye dinna ken Miss Anne."

"Miss Anne's just like ither folk," was the laughing response; "and there's nae ill in being married."

"Lassie, there'll be news o' you, if you're no a' the better hadden in," cried Tibbie. "Set ye up wi' your lads and your marryings! Maybe the young lady's delicate, or she'll hae friends at the sea-side."

To which more delicate fishing interrogatories, Jacky, who knew that Anne was neither delicate nor had any friend at the sea-side, prudently refrained from making any answer.

The next day, Anne, accompanied by Mrs. Aytoun and Alice, set out for Aberford on a search for lodgings. Mrs. Aytoun had a friend, a regular frequenter of all places of general resort, whose list of sea-bathing quarters was almost a perfect one, and fortified by the results of her experience, they departed upon their quest, leaving Jacky, in Bessie's care, behind them, to dream at her leisure over that wonderful Edinburgh, whose stately olden beauty the strange girl, after her own fashion, could appreciate so well.

Anne observed, with regret and sympathy, the gloom of silence that fell over the kind mother

by her side, as they approached their destination. She observed the long, sad glances thrown through the windows of the coach at the country road, known long ago, when Mrs. Aytoun was not a widow. There were no other passengers to restrain their conversation, and when they were very near the village, Mrs. Aytoun pointed to a house, surrounded with wood, and standing at a considerable distance from the road. "Yonder, Alice, look—you were born there."

Alice looked eagerly out. "You liked this place better than Aytoun, mother? Aytoun must have been very gloomy always."

"Aytoun was a larger house than we needed, Alice—you have heard me say so—and I was in very delicate health then. I was never well while—" your father lived, Mrs. Aytoun was about to say, but she checked herself hurriedly; not even in so slight a way would she reproach the dead.

The coach stopped—they were in the dull main street of the village. Mrs. Aytoun took out her list—at the head of the column stood "Mrs. Yammer"—the sea-bathing friend had particularly recommended the house, whose mistress bore so distressful a name. It was a

short way out of the village, close upon the sea-side; they turned to seek it.

The magnificent Firth lay bright before them, its islands standing out darkly from its bosom, and its sunny glories bounded by the fertile shores and distant hills of the ancient kingdom of Fife. The exuberant wealth of these rich Lothian lands was bursting out around into Spring's blythest green—a sunny April sky overhead, and April air waving in its golden breadths about them everywhere—it was impossible to think of sadness there. The shadow of her old woe floated away from Mrs. Aytoun's unselfish spirit—Alice was so gay, Anne so pleasantly exhilarated, that she could not refuse to rejoice with them.

Mrs. Yammer's house promised well. It was seated upon a gentle elevation—its front, at least, for the elevation made a very abrupt descent, and so procured that the rooms which were on the ground-floor before, should be the second story behind. In front ran the road leading to the county town, beyond there were some brief intervening fields, and then the sands. It was not above ten minutes walk from the immediate shore. At some little dis-

tance further on, there stood a house close to the water, standing up, gaunt and tall, from among a few trees. In the bright, living spring-day, it had a spectral, desolate look about it. Anne remarked it with some curiosity as she glanced round; but Mrs. Aytoun had already knocked, and she had not time to look again.

The door was opened by an energetic little servant, who ushered the ladies into an airy, lightsome parlour, with which Alice Aytoun was in ecstasies. One window looked out on the sea—the other, in a corner of the room, had a pleasant view of the fresh green country road, and a glimpse of the village of Aberford itself in the distance; the furniture was very tolerable —the whole room particularly clean.

"O, Anne!" exclaimed Alice Aytoun, "I will come to see you every week!"

A little woman bustled into the room. She had on an old silk gown, curiously japanned by long service, and possessing in an uncommon degree the faculty of rustling—a comical, little, quick, merry, eccentric face—some curls which looked exceedingly like bits of twisted wire, covered by a clean cap of embroidered muslin,

with a very plain border of well-darned lace. Mrs. Aytoun hesitated. To call this little person "Mrs." anything, was palpably absurd; yet they had asked for Mrs. Yammer.

"It's no me, it's my sister," said the brisk little person before them. "I'm Miss Crankie. Will ye sit down ladies? I am very glad to see you."

Mrs. Aytoun sat down—little Alice concealed her laugh by looking steadfastly down the road, at the distant roofs of Aberford, and Anne took a chair beside her.

"Is't no a grand prospect?" said Miss Crankie, "a' the Firth before us, and the town at our right hand—a young lady that was here last simmer said to Tammie (that's my sister, Mrs. Yammer, her name's Thomasine—we call her Tammie for shortness), 'If it wasna for breaking the tenth command, I would covet ye your house, Mrs. Yammer,'—and so dry, and free from drafts, and every way guid for an invalid. It's uncommonly weel likit."

"It seems a very nice house," said Mrs. Aytoun. "Are your rooms disengaged, Miss Crankie?"

"For what time was ye wanting them,

Mem?" said Miss Crankie. "There's young Mrs. Mavis is to be here in July, and Miss Todd was speaking of bringing ower her brother's bairns in August—but I'm aye fond to oblige a lady—for what time was ye wanting them?"

"This young lady, Miss Ross"—Miss Crankie honoured Anne with a queer nod and a smile, which very nearly upset the gravity of Alice, and put Anne's own in jeopardy, "desires to have lodgings in the neighbourhood for this month, and, perhaps, May. What do you think, my dear? will you need them longer?"

"I hope not," said Anne, "but still, it is possible I may."

"Miss Ross requires change of air," said Mrs. Aytoun, faltering and endeavouring to excuse her equivocation, by noticing that Anne did look pale.

"Of scene, rather," said Anne, slightly affected by the same hesitation. It was true, however, if not in the usual sense.

Miss Crankie fixed her odd little black eye upon Anne, nodded, and looked as if she comprehended perfectly.

"Will you be able to accommodate Miss Ross

and her servant, Miss Crankie?" asked Mrs. Aytoun.

"That will I; there's no better accommodation in the haill Lothians; and, for change of scene, what could heart desire better than that—ay, or that either, young Miss, which is as bonnie a country view (no to be the sea) as can be seen. Will ye look at the bed-room?"

Miss Crankie darted out, leading the way. Mrs. Aytoun, Anne, and Alice followed. The bed-room was immediately behind the parlour, resplendent in all the glory of white covers, and chintz curtains, and with an embowered window looking out upon "the green," which was separated from the kitchen-garden by a thick hedge of sweet-briar. Alice was delighted, and Anne so perfectly satisfied, that Mrs. Aytoun made the bargain. The rooms were taken, together with a little den up stairs for Jacky. Miss Crankie faithfully promised in her own name and Mrs. Yammer's, that the apartments shou d be ready for Anne's reception next day; and when they had partaken of a frugal refreshment—some very peculiar wine of Miss Crankie's own manufacture, and cake to correspond—they left the house.

The day was so very beautiful, and Alice enjoyed the rare excursion so much, that they prolonged their walk. "Do you think I could walk out from Edinburgh, mother?" said Alice. "I should like so well to come and see Anne often; and, Anne, you will be dull alone."

"But you will laugh at Miss Crankie, Alice," said Anne, smiling, "and so get into her bad graces."

Alice laughed. "Is she not a very strange person?"

"I have no doubt you will find her a kindly body," said Mrs. Aytoun; "but I hope Jacky's sense of the ludicrous is not so keen as her poetic feelings. You must take care of Jacky."

"O, mamma," said Alice, "you don't know what a strange *good* girl Jacky is. People laugh at her, but she would not hurt any one's feelings."

"You do Jacky justice, Alice," said Anne. "She *is* a strange *good* girl—she—"

Anne paused suddenly, breathless and excited. Who was that tall, gaunt woman, walking thoughtfully with bent head and lingering footstep over the sands? She seemed to have come

from the spectral dark house, which Anne had noticed before, looming so drearily over the sunny waters. She raised her eyes as they met—the large, wistful, melancholy eyes fell upon Anne's face. It was the unknown relative of little Lilie—the passenger who, six months ago, had lingered to cast that same searching, woeful look upon the house of Merkland.

Anne was startled and amazed. She thought the stranger seemed disturbed also. Her eyes appeared to dilate and grow keener as she looked earnestly at Anne, and then passed on.

"Do you know that person?" said Mrs. Aytoun, wonderingly.

Anne turned to look after her; instead of her former slow pace, her steps were now nervously quick and unsteady. Surely some unknown emotion, strong and powerful, had risen in the stranger's breast from this meeting. Anne answered Mrs. Aytoun with an effort. "I do not know her—but I have seen her before—I met her once in Strathoran."

They went on. Anne's mind was engrossed—she could not, as before, take part in the gay con-

versation of Alice. Mrs. Aytoun perceived her gravity. After some time, she asked again: "Do you know who she is? I see you are interested in her."

"I do not know her at all," said Anne. "You will think me very foolish, Mrs. Aytoun, it is her look—her eyes—she has a very remarkable face."

"Probably she lives here," said Mrs. Aytoun. "Let us look at this house."

The house was no less spectral and gaunt, when they were near it, than at a distance. Many of the windows were closed—the large garden seemed perfectly neglected—only some pale spring flowers bloomed in front of a low projecting window, where there seemed to linger some remnants of cultivation. "It is a mysterious-looking house," said Mrs. Aytoun; "she may keep it perhaps—but there certainly can be no family living here."

By-and-by they returned to Edinburgh—where Anne spent the remainder of the day in making some necessary calls. She spoke as little as possible of her intention of remaining in Aberford—those ordinary questions were so difficult to answer.

And who was this melancholy woman who had brought little Lilie to Strathoran? Could *she* have any connection with Norman's history, or was it only the prevailing tone of Anne's mind and thoughts that threw its fantastic colouring on every object she looked upon?

CHAPTER IX.

"Throughout life's homelier web, these tragic threads
Weave their dark broideries. Ah! thou shalt not find
One gentlest nook of mortal land, but there
The presence of some great and silent grief
Doth fall in saddest shadow, o'er the light
Of natural joys and sunshine."

Upon the next day, Anne, accompanied by Jacky, left Edinburgh finally for her Aberford lodgings. She felt the isolation strangely at first; being alone in her own room, and being alone in the parlour of Mrs. Yammer's house, were two very different things. She seated herself by the window as these long afternoon hours wore on. Jacky sat at the other end of the room, already engaged on some one of the

numberless linen articles, which had been provided by her prudent mother, to keep her occupied. Jacky had already cast several longing glances at the little shelf between the windows, which contained the books of Mrs. Yammer's household, but the awe of Anne's presence was upon her; she sewed and dreamed in silence.

The dark spectral house by the waterside—the melancholy woman who had taken Lilie to Strathoran—Anne's mind was full of these. Now and then a chance passenger upon the high road crossed before her; once or twice she had seen a solitary figure on the sands. None of these bore the same look. The steady pace of country business, and the meditative one of country leisure she could notice—nowhere the slow lingering heavy footsteps, the wistful melancholy face which distinguished the one individual, whom that fantastic spirit of imagination had already associated with Norman's fate.

Anne had decided upon beginning her inquiries on the next day. She hastily bethought herself now, of a mode of making this evening of some service in her search; and turning to Jacky, bade her ask Miss Crankie and Mrs.

Yammer to take tea with her. Jacky with some hesitation obeyed—she thought it was letting down Miss Anne's dignity. Miss Anne herself thought it was rather disagreeable and unpleasant: nevertheless, it might be of use, and she was content to endure it.

Miss Crankie had a turban, terrible to behold, made of black net, with what looked like spangles of yellow paint upon it, which she wore on solemn occasions. In honour of her new lodger, she donned it to-night. Jacky arranged the tea in almost sulky silence. At the appointed hour, Miss Crankie and her sister sailed solemnly in.

It was the merest fiction to call this pleasant house the property of Mrs. Yammer, as all who were favoured with any glimpse into its domestic arrangements could easily perceive. Mrs. Yammer was a woeful, patient, resigned woman, very meekly submitting to the absolute dominion of "Johann," and save for a feeble murmuring of her own complaints, the most voiceless and passive of weak-minded sisters. Miss Johann Crankie was very kind to the woeful widow, who hung upon her active hands

so helplessly. She shut her ears to Mrs. Yammer's countless aches and palpitations, as long as it was practicable—when she could no longer avoid hearing them, she administered bitter physic, and mustard plasters; a discipline which was generally successful in frightening away the distempers for some time.

Mrs. Yammer, in a much-suffering plaintive voice, immediately began to tell Anne of the palpitations of her heart. Miss Crankie fidgeted on her seat, shooting odd glances at Jacky, and intelligent ones of ludicrous pity at Anne, who endured Mrs. Yammer's enumeration of troubles as patiently as was possible. The tea was a fortunate diversion.

"What is the name of that house on the waterside, Miss Crankie?" asked Anne.

"That's Schole, Miss Ross," said Miss Crankie, with the air of a person who introduces a notability. "You will have heard of it before, no doubt? It came into the possession of the present Laird, when he was in his cradle, puir bairn, and his light-headed gowk of a mother has him away, bringing him up in England. She's English hersel: maybe ye

might ca' that an excuse. *I* say it's a downright imposition and shame to tak callants away to a strange country to get their breeding, when a'body kens there's no the like o' us for learning in a' the world and Fife!"

"And does the proprietor of the house live in it now?" said Anne.

"Bless me, no—the Laird's but a callant yet. Tammie, woman, what year was't that auld Schole died?"

"It was afore I was married," said Mrs. Yammer, dolefully. "I was a lang tangle of a lassie then, Miss Ross; and I mind o' rinning out without my bonnet, and wi' bare shoulders, and standing by the roadside, to see the funeral gang by. I have never been free o' rheumatism since that day—whiles in my head —whiles in my arm—whiles—"

"Miss Ross will hear a' the round o' them afore she gangs away, Tammie," said Miss Crankie, impatiently, "or else it'll be a wonderful year. It's maybe fifteen or sixteen years ago; and the widow and the bairn were off to England in the first month. Ye may tak my word for't, there wasna muckle grief, though there was crape frae head to fit of her. I mind

the funeral as weel as if it had passed this morning—folk pretending they were honouring the dead, that would scarce have spoken a word to him when he was a living man. He was an old, penurious, nasty body, that bought a young wife wi' his filthy siller. Ye mind him, Tammie?"

"Mind him!" said the martyr Tammie, pathetically, "ay, I have guid reason to mind him. Was I no confined to my bed, haill six weeks after that weary funeral wi' the tic douloureux? the tae cheek swelled, and the tither cheek blistered. I ken naebody, Johann, that has guid reason to mind him as me."

"Weel, weel," said Miss Crankie, "it was a strong plaister of guid mustard that cured ye. It's a comfort that ane needs nae advice to prepare that—its baith easy made and effectual."

Mrs. Yammer was cowed into silence. Miss Crankie, with a triumphant chuckle, went on: "And since then there's been no word of them, Miss Ross, except an intimation in the newspapers, that the light-headed fuil of a woman had married again. Pity the poor bairn that has gotten a stepfather over him, forbye being keeped out of the knowledge o' his ain land.

I was ance in England mysel. There's no an article in't but flat fields, and dead water, and dreary lines o' hedges. Ye may gang frae the tae end to the tither (a' but the north part, and its maistly our ain), and never ken ye have made a mile's progress—its a' the same thing ower again—and sleek cattle, beasts and men, that ken about naething in this world but eating and drinking. To think of a callant being keeped there, out of the knowledge of his ain country, and it a country like this !"

"It is a great pity, certainly," said Anne, smiling.

"Pity! it's a downright wrong and injury to the lad—there's nae saying if his mind will ever get the better o't."

"And is the house empty?" said Anne; "does no one live in it?"

"Naebody that belangs to the house—but there are folk in't. There's a brother and a sister o' them, and they're far frae common folk."

"Is the sister tall and thin—with large, dark, melancholy eyes?" said Anne, anxiously.

"Ay, Miss Ross," said Miss Crankie, casting a sharp inquisitive look at Anne; "where

hae ye fa'en in with her? it's no often she has ony commerce with strangers."

"I met her on the sands," said Anne, suppressing her agitation with an effort; "and was very much struck by her look."

"I dinna wonder at that—she never was just like ither folk; and since her sister died—puir Kirstin!"

"Have they a story then?" said Anne; she was trembling with interest and impatience—she could scarcely contain herself to ask the question.

"Ay, nae doubt, ye'll be fond of stories, Miss Ross? the most of you young ladies are."

"I do feel very much interested in that singular melancholy woman," said Anne, tremulously.

Miss Crankie examined her face with an odd magpie-like curiosity. Anne smiled in spite of herself. The strange little head nodded, and Miss Crankie began:

"Ye see, Kirstin and me were at the Schole thegither. Ye think Kirstin's younger-like than me? Ay, so she is. I was dux of the class and reading in the Bible, when Kirstin began

wi' the question book; but we were at the schule thegither for a' that—there's maybe six or seven years between us. There were three of a family of them; their father had been a doctor—a wild, reckless, dissipated man, like what ower mony were, and the family was puir. I used to take them pieces when they were wee bairns—ye mind, Tammie?"

"Ay," said the doleful Tammie, "ye see Johann has a pleasure in minding thae times, Miss Ross. It's different wi' a puir frail widow-woman like me; the last year I was at the schule I was never dune wi' the toothache."

"Kirstin was the auldest," said Miss Crankie, turning her back impatiently upon her sister, "and Patrick was next to her, and there was as bonnie a bit lassie as ever you saw, Miss Ross, that was the youngest of the three—she wasna like the young lady that was here yesterday—she was darker and mair womanlike; but eh! she was bonnie.

"They had nae mother—Kirstin was like the mother of them. We used to laugh at her, when she was a wean of maybe twelve hersel, guiding the other twa like as if they had been

her ain bairns; she was aye quiet and thoughtful. I was an uncommon grand hand at the bools mysel, and could throw the ba' as far as Robbie King the heckler—ye mind, Tammie?"

"Ye threw't on my head yince and broke the skin," said the disconsolate invalid. "Eh, Miss Ross, the sore headaches I was trysted wi' when I was a bairn!"

"I am saying there were three of them," interrupted Miss Crankie. "They had some bit annuity that keepit them scrimply, and by guid fortune the faither died when Kirstin was about seventeen; so how she guided the siller I canna tell, or if there was a blessing on't like the widow's cruise that never toomed; but she keepit hersel and her little sister decent, and sent Patrick to the college wi' the rest. They had a cottage, and a guid big garden—she used to be aye working in the garden hersel. I believe they lived on greens and 'taties a' the week, and never had fleshmeat in the house but on the Sabbath-day, when Patrick was at hame. Mind, I'm only saying I *think* that, for they were aye decently put on, and made a puir mouth to nobody.

"Patrick was serving his time to be a doctor. He was dune wi' his studies, and was biding at hame for a rest, when a young gentleman that was heir of an auld property, on the ither side of Aberford, came into his fortune. Ye'll maybe have heard of him, Miss Ross—the poor, misguided, unhappy young lad—they ca'ed him Mr. Rutherford, of Redheugh."

Anne could hardly restrain an involuntary start; she answered, as calmly as she could:

"I have heard the name."

"Ay, nae doubt — mony mair folk have heard his name than had ony occasion; it was his ain fault to be sure, but he was just a' the mair to be pitied for that."

"I was aye chief wi' Kirstin. I liked her—maybe she didna dislike me. I've weeded her flowers to her mony a time. I was throughither whiles in my young days, Miss Ross—no very, but gey. I yince loupit from the top of our garden wa' wi' her wee sister in my arms—I had near gotten a lilt with it, for I twisted my ancle—and that would have been a misfortune."

"Ye trampit on my fit—it's never been right since," said Mrs. Yammer; "ye never were out o' mischief."

Miss Crankie gave a sidelong look up to Anne, with her odd, merry, little black eyes, and laughed; she took the accusation as a compliment.

"Weel, but that's no my story. Ye see, Miss Ross, they were never like ither folk—there was aye something about them—I canna describe it. Mrs. Clippie, the Captain's wife, was genteeler than them—to tell the truth we were genteeler oursels; but for a' that, there was just something—I never could ken what it was. They keepit no company, but a' the lads were daft about Marion."

"What Marion?" exclaimed Anne, eagerly.

"Oh, just Marion Lillie, Kirstin's sister."

"Marion Lillie!" a wild thrill of hope, and fear, and wonder shot through Anne's frame. What could that strange conjunction of names portend?

"So ye see, the young gentleman, Mr. Rutherford, of Redheugh, came to the countryside—and Kirstin's house is near his gate, and so he behoved to see the bonnie face at the window. It wasna like he could miss it.

"Before lang he had gotten very chief wi' the haill family—they didna tak it as ony

honour—they were just as if they thought themsels the young Laird's equals; but they were awfu' fond o' him. I have seen Patrick's face flush like fire if onybody minted a slighting word of young Redheugh—no that it was often done, for there was never a man better likit—and Kirstin herself treated him like anither brother, and for Marion—weel, she was but a lassie; but the Laird and her were just like the light of ilk ither's e'en.

"Ye may think, Miss Ross, there was plenty said about it in the countryside. Rich folk said it wasna right, and puir folk said it wasna right; but Kirstin guarded her young sister so, that naebody daured mint a word of ill—it was only spite and ill-nature.

"Maybe, Miss Ross, your maid will carry ben the tray? or I can cry upon Sarah."

Miss Crankie lifted up her voice and called at its loudest pitch for her handmaiden. Sarah entered, and cleared away the tea equipage with Jacky's tardy assistance. Jacky was by no means pleased to find her attendance no longer necessary; she had managed to hear a good deal of the story, and thirsted anxiously for its conclusion.

"Bring me my basket, Sarah," said Miss Crankie. "Miss Ross, ye'll excuse me if I take my work. I have no will to be idle—it's an even down punishment to me."

Mrs. Yammer crossed her hands languidly upon her lap and sighed. Sarah returned, bearing a capacious work-basket, from which Miss Crankie took a white cotton stocking, in which were various promising holes. "If ye want onything of this kind done, I'll be very glad, Miss Ross—I'm a special guid hand."

Anne thanked her.

"But your'e wearying for the end of my story, I see," said Miss Crankie, "just let me get my needle threaded."

The needle was threaded—the stocking was drawn upon Miss Crankie's arm—the black turban nodded in good-humoured indication of having settled itself comfortably—and the story was resumed.

"About that time, when young Redheugh was at his very chiefest with the Lillies, and folk said he was going to be married upon Marion, a gentleman came to stay here awhile for the benefit of the sea-side. His wife was a bit delicate young thing—they said he wasna

ower guid to her. They lived on the other side of the town, and their name was Aytoun. Mr. Rutherford and him had gotten acquaint in Edinburgh, and for awhile they were great cronies. Patrick Lillie could not bide this stranger gentleman—what for I dinna ken—but folk said Redheugh and him had some bit tifft of an outcast about him; onyway it made no difference in their friendship.

"But one July morning, Miss Ross, we were a' startled maist out of our senses: there was an awfu' story got up of a dead man being found by the waterside, just on the skirts of yon muckle wood that runs down close by the sea, and who should this be but the stranger gentleman, Mr. Aytoun. Somebody had shot him like a coward frae behind, and when they looked among the bushes, lo! there was a gun lying, and whose name do you think was on't? just Mr. Rutherford's, of Redheugh.

"The haill country was in a fever—the like of that ye ken was a disgrace to us a'—and it was in everybody's mouth. The first body I thought of was Marion Lillie; the day before she had gone into Edinburgh—folk said it was to

get her wedding dress. Eh, puir lassie! was that no a awfu' story for a bride to hear?

"They gaed to apprehend Mr. Rutherford the same night, but he had fled, and was away before they got to Redheugh, no man kent whither. I met Christian that day; though I ca' her Kirstin, speaking to you, I say aye Miss Lillie to herself. In the one day that the murder was done she had gotten yon look. It feared me when I saw it. Her e'en were travelling far away, as if she could see to ony distance, but had nae vision for things at hand. 'Eh, Miss Lillie!' I said to her, 'isna this an awfu' thing; wha could have thought it of young Redheugh!'

"'I will never believe it!' she said, in a wild way: 'he is not guilty. I will never believe it!'

"'And Miss Marion,' said I, 'bless me, it will break the puir lassie's heart.'

"'I will not let her come home,' said Kirstin, 'I will send her to the west country to my father's friends. She must not come home.'

"She would never say before that there was onything between her sister and young Red-

heugh—now she never tried to deny it, her heart was ower full.

"Weel, Miss Ross, the miserable young man had gotten away in a foreign ship, and they hadna been at sea aboon a week when she foundered, and a' hands were lost; and there was an end of his crime and his punishment—they were baith buried in the sea.

"But no the misery of them—the puir lassie was taen away somegate about Glasgow, but the news came to her ears there. What could ye think, Miss Ross? It wasna like a common death—there was nae hope in it, either for this world or the next. It crushed her, as the hail crushes flowers. Within a fortnight after that, bonnie Marion Lillie was in her grave.

"Patrick was taen ill of a fever—they say the angry words he had spoken about Mr. Aytoun to young Redheugh lay heavy on his mind. Kirstin had to nurse him night and day—she couldna even leave him to see Marion buried. She died, and was laid in her grave among strangers. When Patrick was able to leave his bed, the two went west to see the grave—that was all that remained of their bonnie sister Marion.

"Since that time they have lived sorrowful and solitary, keeping company with naebody; the sore stroke has crushed them baith. Patrick never sought his doctor's licence, nor tried to get a single patient. He has been ever since a broken-down, weak, invalid man."

"He had a frail constitution like my ain," said Mrs. Yammer, "and Johann maun aye have some great misfortune to account for it, when it's naething but weakness. Eh, Miss Ross, if ye only kent the trouble it is to a puir frail creature like me to make any exertion."

Miss Crankie twisted her strange little figure impatiently:

"When auld Schole died, Christian and Patrick flitted into the house, and let their ain; they couldna bide it after that. It's a bit bonnie wee place, maybe twa miles on the ither side of Aberford; and Redheugh is maybe a quarter o' a mile nearer. They say the King gets the lands when ony man does a crime like that; it's what they ca' confiscate. Redheugh has been confiscate before now. The auld Rutherfords were Covenanters lang syne, and lost their inheritance some time in the eight-and-

twenty years—but that was in a guid cause. Ony way, this Mr. Rutherford was the last of his name: if there had been ony heir, I kenna whether he could have gotten Redheugh or no, but it's a mercy the race is clean gane, and there is none living to bear the reproach."

Anne's heart beat loudly against her breast; she remained to represent the fallen house of Rutherford—she was the heir—the reproach; and the suffering must be her's as well as Norman's.

"And was there no doubt?" she asked, "was no one else suspected?"

"Bless me, no; wha in our quiet country-side would lift a hand against a man's life? If he hadna done it, he wadna have fled away; and if Kirstin had ony certainty that he hadna done it, do you think she could have bidden still? Na, I ken Kirstin Lillie better. Patrick was aye a weakly lad, ower gentle for the like of that, but Kirstin could never have sitten down in idleset, if there had been ony hope. Mony a heart was wae for him at the time, but the story has blawn by now; few folk think of it. I wadna have tell't ye, Miss Ross, if ye hadna

noticed Kirstin first yoursel—but ye'll no mention it again."

"I certainly will not do anything that could hurt Miss Lillie's feelings," said Anne.

"Ye see, she's half housekeeper of Schole the now; she pays nae rent, or if there's ony, it's just for the name, and the house is sae dismal-looking that naebody seeks to see't. You would think they couldna thole a living face near them; they gang to the Kirk regular, and whiles ye will see them wandering on the sands; but for visiting onybody, or having onybody visiting them, ye might as weel think of the spirits in heaven having commune with us that are on the earth."

"And that minds me," said Mrs. Yammer, breaking in with a long loud sigh, which the impatient Miss Crankie knew by dire experience was the prelude to a doleful story, "of the awfu' fright I got after my man John Yammer was laid in his grave, that brought on my palpitation. Ye see, Miss Ross, I was sitting my lane, yae eerie night about Martinmas, in my wee parlour that looks out on the green; and Johann, she was away at Aberford, laying

in some saut meat for the winter—wasna it saut meat, Johann?"

"Never you mind, Tammie, my woman," said Johann, persuasively. "We're dune wi' saut meat for this year."

"Ay, but it was just to let Miss Ross see the danger of ower muckle thought, and how it brought on my palpitation. Eh woman, Johann, if ye only kent how my puir heart beats whiles, louping in my breast like a living creature!"

And the whole story was inflicted upon Anne—of how Mrs. Yammer, on the aforesaid dreary Martinmas night, fancied she saw the shadow of the umquhile John, gloomily lowering on her parlour wall; of how her heart "played thud and cracked, like as it wad burst," as the shadowy head nodded solemnly, darkening the whole apartment; of how at last Johann returned, and with profane laughter, discovered the ghost to be the shadow of a branch of the old elm without, some bare twigs upon the extremity of which were fashioned into the likeness of an exceeding *retrousée* nose, "the very marrow" of that prominent feature in the

face of the late lamented John; of which discovery his mournful relic was but half convinced, and her heart had palpitated since, "sometimes less, and sometimes mair, but I've never been quit o't for a week at a time."

The infliction terminated at last; Miss Crankie carried her sister off, when the gloaming began to darken, having sufficient discernment to perceive that Anne's patience had been enough tried for a beginning.

Anne's thoughts were in a maze. She sat down by the window in the soft gloom of the spring night, and looked towards the house, where beat another true and faithful heart which had wept and yearned over Norman—Marion—Marion—was she living or dead? could this Christian Lillie be aware of Norman's existence, and of his innocence? There could not be two betrothed Marions. In the latter part of the story, the countryside must have been deceived. Who so likely to accompany the exile as the sister of this brave woman, who had done the housemother's self-denying duty in her earliest youth? Anne's pulse beat quick, she became greatly agitated; was there then

a tie of near connexion between herself and this stranger, whose path she had again crossed? Was Norman's wife Christian's sister? had they an equal stake in the return of the exile?

She could not sit still—cold dew was bursting upon her forehead; she walked from window to window in feverish excitement. Could she dare to ask?—could she venture to make herself known? Alas, she was still no whit advanced in her search for proof of Norman's innocence! If Christian Lillie had possessed any clue, she must, it was certain, have used it before now; and until some advance had been made, these two strangers in their singular kindred would not dare to whisper to one another that Norman lived.

Anne threw herself upon her chair again. And Lilie—who was Lilie? Why was this stranger child brought—of all localities in the world—to the neighbourhood of Merkland? Could it be?—could it be? her heart grew sick with feverish hope and anxiety; her mind continued to hover about, and dwell upon this mystery; but she almost forcibly restrained

herself from articulate thought upon it—she could not venture yet to entertain the hope.

And Norman! Esther Fleming's story had brought him out clear before her, in the gay light of his generous boyhood. Graver and more deeply affecting was this. Who might venture to compute the untold agonies of that terrible time of parting — the nervous compulsory strength of the girl-heart that went with him—the stern patience of the maturer one, who abode by the sick-bed at home! Grief that must have remained with all its burning sense of wrong, and heavy endurance of an undeserved curse, since ever little Alice Aytoun opened her blue eyes to the light—a lifetime of pain, and fear, and sorrow — too dreadful to look back upon!

And Anne's heart sank when she looked forward—living here, in the immediate spot where the deed was done, with all facility for collecting favourable evidence, and with better knowledge, and a more immediate certainty of Norman's innocence than even Anne herself could have—why had the brother and sister

done nothing to remove this stain? She could only account for it by supposing them paralysed with fear—terrified to risk the present security of those so dear to them, for any uncertainty, even of complete acquittal — and afraid of making any exertion, lest the eyes of curiosity should be turned upon them.

The Forth lay vast in silvery silence, breathing long sighs along its sands. Opposite, swelling soft and full, in the spiritual dimness of the spring night, rose the fair lands of Fife. Still and solemn in its saintly evening rest, lay the beautiful earth everywhere. Only awake and watching, under dusky roofs, and in dim chambers, were the hoping, toiling, wrestling souls of men, nobler and of mightier destiny, than even the beautiful earth.

The next morning, when she entered the sunny little parlour, Anne found Jacky rearranging, according to her own ideas of elegance, the breakfast equipage, which Miss Crankie's energetic little servant had already placed upon the table. Anne smiled, and felt almost uncomfortable, as she observed the solitary cup and saucer on the table—the single

plate—the minute teapot. After all, this living alone, had something very strange in it.

Jacky seemed to think so too: she filled out Anne's cup of tea, and lingered about the back of her chair.

"If ye please, Miss Anne—"

"Well, Jacky?"

"If ye please," said Jacky, hesitating, "do ye ken wha little Miss Lilie is?"

Anne started and turned round in alarm—was this strange, dark maid of her's really an elfin, after all?

"No, Jacky," she said. "Why do you ask?"

"Because—it's no forwardness, Miss Anne," murmured Jacky, hanging down her head.

"I know that, Jacky—because what?"

"Because, Miss Anne," said Jacky, emboldened, "I saw a lady down on the sands. She was standing close by the bushes at yon dark house, and her e'en were travelling ower the water, and her face was white—I will aye mind it—and—"

"And what?"

"It was her that brought little Lilie to the

Mill. I saw her once by Oranside at night; and she was on our side of the water; and she was looking across at Merkland."

"Was Lilie with her then, Jacky?"

"No, Miss Anne; but I saw her after, leading Lilie by the hand, and then she was on the Merkland side, where Esther Fleming lives; and she was walking about, canny and soft, as if she wanted to see in."

"And are you sure it is the same lady, Jacky?" said Anne.

"I ken, Miss Anne," said Jacky, eagerly; "because there's no twa faces like yon in a' the world; and, Miss Anne, do ye mind Lilie's e'en?"

"Yes, Jacky."

Anne did recollect them—and how dark and full their liquid depths were!

"Because Lilie's e'en are the very same—only they're no sae woeful—and I kent the lady would be some friend, but Mrs. Melder said it couldna be her mother."

Anne's heart swelled full. Could this little child be as near of kindred to herself as to Christian Lillie? Her mind was overflowing with this. She forgot that Jacky lingered.

"And, if ye please, Miss Anne—"

Anne again turned round to listen.

"She was looking away ower the water, and leaning on the hedge—maybe she lives yonder—and Miss Anne—"

"What is it, Jacky?"

Jacky drew near and spoke very low:

"Do you mind the sang, Miss Anne, that Miss Alice sang on the New-year's night, when Mr. Archibald came home to the Tower?"

Anne started.

"The lady was saying it to hersel very low—the way Lilie sings her strange music."

"What did she say, Jacky?"

"If ye please, Miss Anne, it was a short verse—it was about seeing the stars rise upon the Oran. I can say't a'." And Jacky hung back, and blushed and hesitated.

The connexion became clearer by every word. "The student lad" who wrote this ballad—could it be Patrick Lillie?

"Was it last night you heard this, Jacky?"

"No, Miss Anne, it was this morning very early. I wanted to see the sea," said Jacky, bashfully, "and I saw the sun rise. But I think the lady wasna heeding for the sea.

She wasna there at a'. She was in her ain spirit."

"And you are sure you are not mistaken, Jacky?" said Anne

"Miss Anne!" exclaimed Jacky, "ye would ken yourself, if you saw her. Its just Lilie's e'en—only they are far, far deeper and sadder, and aye searching and travelling, as if something was lost that they bid to find, and were seeking for night and day."

"That they bid to find!" The words roused Anne. "Did you mention this to any one?" she asked.

Jacky looked injured—an imputation on her honour she could not bear.

"I never tell things, Miss Anne. I'm no a talepyet."

"Well, Jacky, remember that I trust you. I have heard that this lady has had great sorrow; and she has some good reason, no doubt, for not keeping Lilie beside her. Mind, you must never mention this to any one—not to Bessie—not even to your mother, when we return. No one knows it, but you and me. I am sure I can trust you, Jacky."

Jacky gave a faithful promise, and went away with secret and proud dignity. She also had entered upon the search—she had begun to co-operate with Anne.

CHAPTER X.

"On every side the aspect was the same,
All ruined, desolate, forlorn, and savage;
Nor hand nor foot within the precinct came
To rectify or ravage.
Yet over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted."

HOOD.

ANNE had fairly started upon her voyage of discovery. The beginning of it cost her many thoughts. She had half advanced to various peasant wives, whom she saw at cottage doors, screaming to unruly children, or out upon the universal "green," superintending their little bleaching—and had as often shrunk back, in

painful timidity, which she blamed herself greatly for, but could not manage to overcome. It was quite different among the well-known cottages of Strathoran, though even with them, Anne would have felt visits of condescension or patronage unspeakably awkward and painful. Now this constitutional shyness must be overcome. Walking along the high road, a considerable way beyond the village of Aberford, she suddenly came upon a desolate mansion-house. The broken gate hung by the merest tag of hinge; the stone pillars were defaced and broken. What had formerly been ornamental grounds before the house, were a jungle of long grass, and uncouth brushwood. Bushes grown into unseemly straggling trees, beneath the shadow of which, thistles and nettles luxuriated, and plumes of unshorn grass waved rank and long, as if in the very triumph of neglect. The house-door hung as insecurely as the gate—the steps were mossy and cracked —the windows entirely shattered, and in some cases the very frames of them broken. Behind, the gardens lay in a like state of desolation. Here and there a cultivated flower, which had been hardy enough to cling to its

native soil, marked among wild blossoms, and grass, and weeds, a place where care and culture had once been. Upon a mossed and uneven wall some fruit-trees clung, rich with blossoms: it had been an orchard once. In the midst of another waste and desolate division stood the broken pedestal of a sun-dial; a sloping wilderness ascended from it to the low windows of what seemed once to have been a drawing-room. A spell of neglect was over it all, less terrific than that still horror which a poet of our own time has thrown over his haunted house, but yet in the gay wealth and hopefulness of spring, striking chill and drearily upon the observer's eye. Anne examined it with curious interest; she could suspect what house it was.

A little further on she came upon a cottage of better size and appearance than most, with a well-filled little garden before its door, and knots of old trees about it. It was the house of a "grieve," or farm overseer, a rising man in his humble circle, whose wife aimed at being genteel. She stood in the door, basking in the sun, with her youngest baby in her arms; the

good woman had a multitude of babies; the latest dethroned one was tumbling about at her feet. Anne bent over the little gate to ask the name of the forlorn and desolate house she had just past.

"Oh, that's Redheugh," said Mrs. Brock, the grieve's wife.

Anne lingered, and held out her hand to the hardy little urchin scrambling in the garden. Mrs. Brock looked as if she would quite like to enter into conversation:

"Be quiet, Geordie; ye'll dirty the lady's gloves."

"No, no," said Anne, taking the small brown hand into her own. "I am very fond of children, and this is a fine, sturdy little fellow."

"Ye'll be a stranger, I'm thinking?" said Mrs. Brock. "There's few folk in our parish that dinna ken Redheugh."

"Yes," said Anne, "I am quite a stranger; what is the reason it lies so deserted and desolate?"

"Ye'll be come to the sea-side?" pursued Mrs. Brock; "it's no often we have folk out

frae Edinburgh sae early in the year. Is't no unco cauld for bathing?"

"I should think it was," said Anne smiling, "but I have never bathed yet."

"It'll be just for the sea air?" continued Mrs. Brock. "Are ye bideing far frae here, Mem, if yin may ask?"

"I am living a good way on the other side of Aberford," said Anne.

"Oh, and ye have had a lang walk, and it's a warm day. Get out of the road, Geordie; will ye no come in and sit down? ye'll be the better for the rest?"

Mrs. Brock, as we have before said, had an ambition to be genteel. Now Anne Ross with her very plain dress, and quite simple manners, was eminently ladylike, and might be a desirable acquaintance. Anne accepted the invitation, and setting the strong little urchin, whom his mother knocked about with so little delicacy, on his feet, she led him in with her.

Mrs. Brock's parlour was a temple sacred to company, and holidays. Its burnished grate, and narrow mantelpiece, were elaborately ornamented with foreign shells; brilliant peacock feathers waved gracefully over the gilded frame

of the little square mirror; the carpet was resplendent in all the colours of the rainbow. There were sturdy mahogany chairs, and a capacious haircloth sofa—the two ends of a dining-table stood in the middle of the room, elaborated into the brightest polish—the centre piece was placed against the wall, and decorated with a case of stuffed birds. Mrs. Brock paused at the door, and contemplated it all with infinite complacency. It was something to have so grand a place to exhibit to a stranger.

"Take a seat on the sofa, Mem; ye'll be wearied wi' your lang walk. Geordie, ye little sinner, wad ye put your dirty shoon on the guid carpet? Get away wi' ye."

Mrs. Brock bundled the little fellow unceremoniously out, and seated herself opposite her guest.

"You have a fine view," said Anne.

"Is't no beautiful? They tell me there's no a grander sight in the world than just the Firth and Fife. Yonder's the Lomonds, ye ken, and yon muckle hill, even over the water, that's Largo Law. My mother was a Fife woman—I have lived at Colinsbrugh mysel;

and we can see baith Inchkeith and the May in a clear day, no to speak o' the Bass. We're uncommonly well situate here; it's a fine house altogether."

"It seems so, indeed," said Anne.

"Ye see the only ill thing about it is, that it's no our ain. George was uncommon keen to have had the house the bairns were a' born in. He's an awfu' man for his bairns."

"Very natural," said Anne.

"Oh, ay, nae doubt it's natural, but it's no ilka body that has the thought; he wad have gien twa hunder pounds for the house—twa clear hunder—it's no worth that siller, ye ken, but it's just because we've been in't sae lang. But Miss Lillie wadna hear o't; it's no every day she could get an offer like that, and they canna be sae weel off as to throw away twa hunder pounds, ane would think."

"Is this Miss Lillie's house?" said Anne.

"Ay—ye'll ken Miss Lillie it's like?"

"No," said Anne, "I do not know her, but I have heard her name."

"There's bits of conveniences a' through it," said Mrs. Brock, "that had been putten up

when they were bidcing here themsels; and the garden behint is just beautiful. Miss Lillie beggit George to keep the flowers right, and he takes uncommon pains with them. He's a guid-hearted man, our George; ye'll no often meet wi' the like of him."

"And that house of Redheugh," said Anne; "why is it so neglected and desolate?"

"Eh, bless me!" said Mrs. Brock, "have ye no heard the story?"

"What story?" said Anne.

"Eh, woman!" exclaimed the grieve's wife, forgetting her good manners in astonishment. "Ye maun have been awfu' short time hereabout, if ye havena heard the story of the Laird o' Redheugh."

"I only arrived yesterday," said Anne.

"Weel, it's no ill to tell. The young gentleman that aught it killed a man, and was drowned himsel when he was trying to escape: it's just as like the Book o' Jonah as anything out o' the Bible could be. There was a great storm, and the ship he was in sank; he couldna carry the guilt of the bluid over the sea. They say murder wouldna hide if ye could put a' the

tokens o't beneath North Berwick Law. It made an awfu' noise in the countryside at the time, but it's no muckle thought o' now, only a'body kens what gars the house lie desolate. Folk say ye may see the gentleman that was killed, and Redheugh himsel in his dreeping-claes, like as if he was new come up from the bottom of the sea, fighting and striving in the auld avenue—aye at midnight o' the night it was done — but *ye'll* no believe the like o' that?"

"No," said Anne vacantly; she did not know what she answered.

"Weel, I never saw onything myself—but they say the spirit's ill to pacify, that's met wi' a violent death—and I wad just be as weel pleased no to put myself in the way. I have aye an eerie feeling when I pass the gate at night. After a' ye ken, there's naething certain about it in Scripture—maybe the dead can come back, maybe they canna — ane disna ken. I think it's aye best to keep out of the gait."

"It is, no doubt, the most prudent way," said Anne, smiling.

"Ye wad, maybe, like to see the garden, Miss—"

Mrs. Brock was mightily anxious to know who her visitor was.

"Ross," said Anne.

"Weel, Miss Ross, I am sure ye'll be pleased wi' the garden—will ye come this way?"

Anne followed. The garden was in trim order — well kept and gracefully arranged. Spring flowers, with their delicate hopeful fragrance and pale hues, were scattered through the borders. The blossom on the lilac bushes was already budded, and the hawthorn had here and there unfolded its first flowers.

"But the simmer-house, Miss Ross," said Mrs. Brock.

The summer-house was not one of the ordinary tea-garden abominations. It was a knoll of soft turf, the summit of which had been formed into a seat, with a narrow space of level greensward for its footstool. Over it was a light and graceful canopy, with flowering plants more delicate and rare, than are generally seen in cottage gardens, clustering thickly over it, while the foliage of some old trees, growing at

the foot of the hillock, made a rich background. From its elevated seat, you could see the slopes of Fife lying fair below the sun, and the gallant Forth between. Anne stood and gazed round her in silence. She could see the dark trees, and high roof of Redheugh at her other hand; how often might Norman, in his happy years long ago, have stood upon this spot? Yet here it shone in its fresh life and beauty, when all that remained of him, was dishonour and desolation!

But there was in this a solemn, silent hope which struck Anne to the heart. Christian Lillie had entreated, as her tenant said, that these flowers should be carefully tended. Christian Lillie would not part with the house. Was she not looking forward, then, to some future vindication—to some home-coming of chastened joyfulness—to some final light, shedding the radiance of peace upon her evening time?

Anne had to sit down in Mrs. Brock's parlour again, and suffer herself to be refreshed with a glass of goosebery wine, not quite so delectable as Mrs. Primrose's immortal prepara-

tion, before she was permitted to depart. Mrs Brock had another decanter upon her table, filled with a diabolical compound, strongly medicinal in taste and odour, which she called ginger wine, and which Anne prudently eschewed—and a plate of rich "short-bread," at which little Geordie, tumbling on the mat at the door, cast longing loving looks. Mrs. Brock hoped Miss Ross would come to see her again.

"It's just a nice walk. Ye maun come and tak' a cup o' tea when George is in himsel. He's an uncommon weel-learned man, our George—he could tell ye a' the stories o' the countryside."

Anne had to make a half promise that she would return to avail herself of the stores of George Brock's information, before his admiring wife released her.

She had overcome her repugnance a little—it was a tolerable beginning so far as that went—but how dark, how hopeless seemed the prospect! There was no doubt in that confident expression—no benevolent hope that Norman might be guiltless! She had been told so long

before, and had come to Aberford, in the face of that. Yet the repetition of it by so many indifferent strangers discouraged her sadly—her great expectation collapsed. Only a steady conviction in her brother's innocence, a solemn hope of vindication to him, living or dead, upheld her in her further way.

In the evening she wandered out upon the sands. It was a still night, wrapped in the gray folds of a mistier gloaming, than she had before seen sinking over the brilliant Firth. Anne hovered about the enclosure of Schole. The dreary house had a magnetic attraction for her. She stood by the low gate, close to the water, and looked in. The high foliage of the hedge hid her—the gate itself was the only loophole in the thick fence, which surrounded the house on all sides. There was light in the low projecting window, which dimly revealed a gloomy room, furnished with book-shelves. At a sort of study table, placed in the recess of the window, there sat a man bending over a book. His face was illuminated by the candle beside him. A pale, delicate face it was, telling of a mind nervously susceptible, a spirit answering

to every touch, with emotion so intense and fine, as to make the poetic temperament, not a source of strength and mighty impulse, as in hardier natures, but a well-spring of exquisite feebleness—a fountain of pensive blight and beauty. The snowy whiteness of his high, thin temples, the long silky fair hair upon his stooping head, heightened the impression of delicate grace and feebleness. He looked young, but had, in reality, seen nearly forty years of trouble and sorrow. His brow was almost covered by the long, thin white fingers that supported it. He was absorbed in his book.

A strange resemblance to Christian Lillie was in the student's pale and contemplative face. There could be no doubt that he was her invalid brother—and yet how strangely unlike they were!

Anne turned to pursue her walk along the dim sands. A faint ray of moonlight was stealing through the mist, silvering the water, and the long glistening line of its wet shores here and there. In the light, she caught a glimpse of a slow advancing figure. Fit place and time it was, for such a meeting—for the

tall dark outline and slow step, could belong to but one person. Anne trembled, and felt her own step falter. They had never yet heard each other's voices, yet were connected by so close a tie—were wandering upon this solitary place, brooding over one great sorrow—perhaps tremulously embracing one solemn hope.

When they met, she faltered some commonplace observation about the night. To her astonishment, Christian Lillie replied at once. It might be that she saw Anne's agitation—it might be that she also longed to know Norman's sister. That she knew her to be so, Anne could not doubt: her melancholy contemplation of Merkland—her evident start and surprise, when they formerly met upon the sands, made that certain.

"Yes," said Christian Lillie, in a voice of singular sadness, "it is a beautiful night."

The words were of the slightest—the tone and manner, the drawing in of that long breath, spoke powerfully. This, then, was her one pleasure—this gentle air of night was the balm of her wearied spirit.

"The mist is clearing away," said Anne,

tremulously. "Yonder lights on the Fife shore are clear now—do you see them?"

"Ay, I see them," was the answer. "Cheerful and pleasant they look here. Who knows what weariness and misery—what vain hopes and sick hearts they may be lighting."

"Let us not think so," said Anne, gently. "While we do not know that our hopes are vain, we still have pleasure in them."

"I have seen you more than once before," said Christian Lillie. "You are not, or your face is untrue, one to think of vain pleasure at an after-cost of pain. Hopes!—I knew what they were once—I know now what it is to feel the death of them: what think you of the vain toils that folk undergo for a hope? the struggle and the vigils, and the sickness of its deferring? I see lights burning yonder through all the watches of the night—what can it be but the fever of some hope that keeps them always shining? I saw yours in your window last night, when everybody near was at rest but myself. What is it that keeps you wakeful but some hope?"

"You know me then—you know what my hope is?" said Anne, eagerly.

"No," said Christian. "Tell it not to me. I have that in me that blights hope—and the next thing after a blighted hope, is a broken heart. It is wonderful—God shield you from the knowledge—how long a mortal body will hold by life, after there is a broken heart within it! I think sometimes that it is only *us* who know how strong life is—not the hopeful and joyous, but us, who are condemned to bear the burden—us, who drag these days out as a slave drags a chain."

"Do not say so," said Anne. Her companion spoke with the utmost calmness—there was a blank composure about her, which told more powerfully even than her words, the death of hope. "There can be no life, however sorrowful, that has not an aim—an expectation."

"An aim?—ay, an aim! If you knew what you said you would know what a solemn and sacred thing it is that has stood in my path, these seventeen years, the ending of my travail—an expectation! What think you of looking forward all that time, as your one aim and expectation—almost, God help us, as your hope—for a thing which you knew would rend your

very heart, and make your life a desert when it came—what think ye of that? There are more agonies in this world than men dream of in their philosophy."

"Are we not friends?" said Anne. "Have we not an equal share in a great sorrow that is past—I trust and hope in a great joy that is to come? Will you not take my sympathy?—my assistance?"

Christian Lillie shrank, as Anne thought, from her offered hand.

"An equal share—an equal share. God keep you from that—but it becomes you well: turn round to the light, and let me see your face."

She laid her hand on Anne's shoulder, and, turning her round, gazed upon her earnestly.

"Like—and yet unlike," she murmured. "You are the only child of your mother? she left none but you?"

"Except—"

"Hush, what would you say?" said Christian, hurriedly. "And you would offer me sympathy and help? Alas! that I cannot take it at your hands. You have opened a fountain in this

withered heart, that I thought no hand in this world could touch but one. It is a good deed—you will get a blessing for it—now, fare you well."

"Shall I not see you again?" said Anne.

Christian hesitated.

"I do not know—why should you? you can get nothing but blight and disappointment from me, and yet—for once—you may come to me at night—not to-morrow night, but the next. I will wait for you at the little gate; and now go home and take rest—is it not enough that one should be constantly watching? Fare you well."

Before Anne could answer, the tall, dark, gliding figure was away—moving along with noiseless footstep over the sands to the gate of Schole. She proceeded on herself, in wonder and agitation—how shallow was her concern for Norman in comparison with this; how slight her prospect of success when this earnest woman, whose words had such a tone of power in them, even in the deepness of her grief, declared that in her all hope was dead. It was a blow to all her expectations—nevertheless it did not

strike her in that light. Her anticipation of the promised interview, her wonder at what had passed in this, obliterated the discouraging impression. She was too deeply interested in what she had seen and heard, to think of the stamp of hopelessness which these despairing words set on her own exertions. That night she transferred her lights early from her little sitting-room to the bedchamber behind. That was a small matter, if it gave any satisfaction to the melancholy woman, the light from whose high chamber window she could see reflected on the gleaming water, after Miss Crankie's little household had been long hours at rest.

The next day was a feverish day to Anne, and so was the succeeding one. She took long walks to fill up the tardy time, and made acquaintance with various little sunbrowned rustics, and cottage mothers; but gained from them not the veriest scrap of information about Norman, beyond what she already knew—that he had killed a man, and had been drowned in his flight from justice—that now the property, as they thought, was in the king's hands, "and him having sae muckle," as one

honest woman suggested, "he didna ken weel what to do wi't. Walth gars wit waver—it's a shame to fash him, honest man, wi' mair land than he can make ony use o'—it would have been wiser like to have parted it among the puir folk."

On the afternoon of the day on which she was to see Christian Lillie again, Anne lost herself in the unknown lanes of Aberford. After long wandering she came to the banks of a little inland water, whose quiet, wooded pathway was a great relief to her, after the dust and heat of the roads. She stayed for a few minutes to rest herself; upon one hand lay a wood stretching darkly down as she fancied to the sea. She was standing on its outskirts where the foliage thinned, yet still was abundant enough to shade and darken the narrow water; a little further on, the opposite bank swelled gently upward in fields, cultivated to the streamlet's edge—but the side on which she herself stood, was richly wooded along all its course, and matted with a thick undergrowth of climbing plants and shrubs and windsown seedlings. The path wound at some little distance from the

waterside through pleasant groups of trees. Anne paused, hesitating and undecided, not knowing which way to turn. A loud and cheerful whistle sounded behind her, and looking back, she saw a ruddy country lad, of some sixteen or seventeen years, trudging blythely along the pathway; she stopped him to ask the way.

"Ye just gang straight forenent ye," said the lad, "even on, taking the brig at Balwithry, and hauding round by the linn in Mavisshaw. Ye canna weel gang wrang, unless ye take the road that rins along the howe of the brae to the Milton, and it's fickle to ken which o' them is the right yin, if ye're no acquaint."

"I am quite a stranger," said Anne.

"I'm gaun to the Milton mysel," said the youth. "I'll let ye see the way that far, and then set ye on to the road."

Anne thanked him, and walked on briskly with her blythe conductor, who stayed his whistling, and dropped a step or two behind, in honour of the lady. He was very loquacious and communicative.

"I'm gaun hame to see my mother. My

father was a hind on the Milton farm, and my mother is aye loot keep the house, now that she's a widow-woman. I've been biding wi' my uncle at Dunbar. He's a shoemaker, and he wanted to bind me to his trade."

"And will you like that?" said Anne.

"Eh no—I wadna stand it; I aye made up my mind to be a ploughman like my father before me; sae my uncle spoke for me to the grieve at Fantasie and I'm hired to gang hame at the term. So I cam the noo to see my mother."

"Have you had a long walk?" said Anne.

"It's twal mile—it was eleven o'clock when I started—I didna ken what hour it is noo. It should be three by the sun."

Anne consulted her watch; it was just three; the respect of her guide visibly increased —gold watches were notable things in Aberford.

"I thought yince of starting at night. Eh! if I had been passing in the dark, wadna I hae been frighted to see a leddy thonder."

"Why yonder?" said Anne "is there anything particular about that place?"

"Eh!" exclaimed the lad, "do ye no ken? there was a man killed at the fit of thon tree."

Anne started. "Who was he?" she asked.

"I dinna mind his name—it's lang, lang ago —but he was a gentleman, and my father was yin o' the witnesses. Maybe ye'll have seen a muckle house, ower there, a' disjasket and broken down. George Brock, the grieve lives near the gate o't—it's no far off."

"Yes, I have seen it," said Anne.

"Weel, the gentleman that killed him lived there—at least a'body said it was him that did it—I have heard my father speak about him mony a time."

"And what was your father a witness of?" said Anne.

"Oh, he met Redheugh coming out of the wood—only my father aye thought that he bid to be innocent, for he was singing, and smiling, and as blythe as could be."

"And your father thought him innocent?" said Anne eagerly.

"Ay—at least he thought it was awfu' funny, if he had killed the man, that he should be looking sae blythe. A' the folk say there was

nae doubt about it, and sae does my mother, but my father was aye in a swither; he thought it couldna be. Here's the Milton, and ower yonder, ye see, like a white line — yon's the road—it's just the stour that makes it white; and if ye turn to the right, and haud even on, ye'll come to the toun."

Anne thanked him, and offered some small acknowledgment, with which the lad, though he took it reluctantly, and with many scruples, went away, whistling more blythely than ever. How little did the youthful rustic imagine the comfort and hope and exhilaration which these thoughtless words of his had revived in his chance companion's heart!

There had been one in this little world, who, in the midst of excitement, and in the face of evidence, and the universal opinion of his fellows, held Norman innocent. Anne thanked God, and took courage—there was yet hope.

She waited nervously for the evening; when the darkness of the full night came stealing on, she glided along the sands to the gate of Schole.

The projecting window was dark; there

seemed to be no light in the whole house. She looked over the gate anxiously for Christian —no one was visible—dark ever-green shrubs looking dead and stern among the gay spring verdure, stood out in ghostly dimness along the garden; the house looked even more gloomy and dismal than heretofore, and the night was advancing.

Anne tried the gate; it opened freely. She went lightly along the mossed and neglected path to the principal door. It was evidently unused, and in grim security barred the entrance; she passed the projecting window again, and with some difficulty found a door at the side of the house, at which she knocked lightly.

There was evidently some slight stir within; she thought she could hear a sound as of some one listening. She knocked again—there was no response—she repeated her summons more loudly; there was nothing clandestine in her visit to Christian.

She fancied she could hear steps ascending a stair, and echoing with a dull and hollow sound through the house. Presently a window above

was opened, and the face of an old woman, buried in the immense borders of a white night-cap, looked out:

"Eh! guid preserve us. Wha are ye, disturbing honest folk at this hour o' the night; and what do ye want?"

"Is Miss Lillie not within?" said Anne in disappointment.

"Miss Lillie! muckle you're heeding about Miss Lillie; it's naething but an excuse for theftdom and spoliation; but I warn ye, ye'll get naething here. Do ye ken there's an alarm-bell in Schole?"

"I am alone," said Anne, "and have merely come to see Miss Lillie, I assure you. You see I could do you no injury."

"And how div I ken," said the cautious portress a little more gently, "that ye havena a band at the ither side of the hedge?"

"You can see over the hedge," said Anne, smiling in spite of her impatience, "that I am quite alone. Pray ask Miss Lillie to admit me; she will tell you that I came by her own appointment."

"A bonnie like hour for leddies to be visiting

at," said the old woman; "and how div ye ken that Miss Lillie will come at my ca'?"

"Pray do not keep me waiting," said Anne, "it is getting late. Tell Miss Lillie that I am here."

"And if I were gaun to tell Miss Lillie ye were here, wha would take care o' the house, I wad like to ken? Ye're no gaun to pit your gowk's errands on me. If I had the loudest vice in a' Scotland, it wadna reach Miss Lillie, an I cried till I was hoarse."

"You don't mean to say," exclaimed Anne, "that she is not at home!—that Miss Lillie has left Schole?"

"Ay, deed div I—nothing less. Mr. Patrick and her gaed away last night, to see their friends in the west country. Is that a'? If ye had a hoast like me, and were as muckle fashed wi' your breath, ye wadna have keeped your head out of the window sae long as I have done."

"Did she leave no word?" said Anne, "no message — or did she say when she would return?"

"Neither the tane nor the tither: she never

said a word to me, but that they were gaun to the west country to see their friends. What for should they no? They are as free to do their ain pleasure as ither folk."

Anne turned away, greatly disappointed and bewildered.

"Be sure you sneck the gate," screamed the careful guardian of Schole, "and draw the stane close till't that ye pushed away wi' your fit."

Anne obeyed, and proceeded homeward very much downcast and disappointed. She had expected so much from this interview, and had looked forward to it so anxiously. Why should they avoid her? For what reason should the nearest relatives of Norman's wife, flee from Norman's sister? She herself had hailed, with feelings so warmly and sadly affectionate, the idea of their existence and sympathy—perhaps of their co-operation and help. Now Christian's words returned to her mind in sad perplexity. She could find no clue to them. The house of Schole looked more dreary and dismal than ever. She felt a void as she looked back to it, and knew that the watcher, whose light had fallen upon the still waters of the Firth through all the lingering

night, was there no longer. She left her watch at the window early, and, with a feeling of blank disappointment and loneliness, laid herself down to her disturbed and dreaming rest—very sad, and disconsolate, and unsettled—seeing no clear prospect before her, nor plan of operation.

END OF VOL II.

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